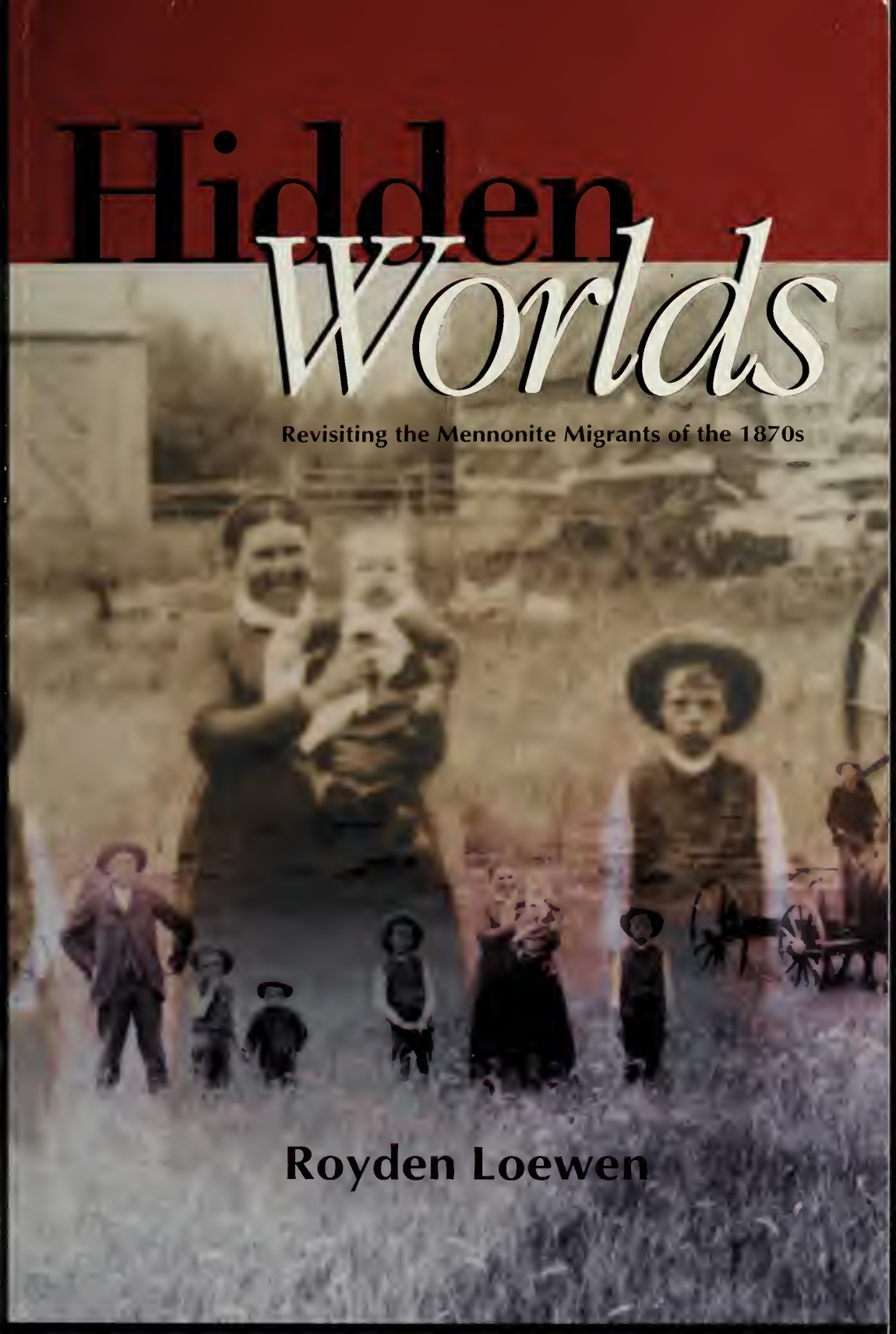



# Hidden *Worlds*

Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s



Royden Loewen



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## **Hidden Worlds**



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Revisiting the Mennonite Migrants of the 1870s

**Royden Loewen**

BETHEL COLLEGE  
North Newton, Kansas, 2001

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*for:*

*Becky and her remarkable 'wondering'*

*Meg and her enchanting 'neighbourliness'*

*Sasha and his sensible 'temporality'*





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## Acknowledgements

THIS BOOK BEGAN AS THE “MENNO SIMONS” LECTURES AT BETHEL College, Kansas, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the migration of Mennonites from Imperial Russia to the North American interior. As the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, I had invited the historians at Bethel College to co-host a conference that would revisit the migration of the 1870s with themes of social and cultural history. My friends at Bethel, however, turned the invitation around and asked me to visit them with a lecture series instead. Those lectures, given in November 1999, were eclectic in nature. Their purpose was to seek new ways of understanding the nature of the Mennonite society that was transplanted across the ocean, and which took root in Manitoba, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Dakota. They were shaped by my love of the ordinary person’s reflections, imaginations, work, play, and relationships in the everyday context and the idea that these are the sites in which culture is born and expressed. I am mindful of the skillful scholars—church historians, local historians, sociologists, geographers—who have laid the groundwork for the study of this migration. I make unabashed use of their work. The approach of this work is based on social and cultural history.

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Emigration to North America, 1870s.



Mennonite Colonies in Imperial Russia, 1800s.



Russian Mennonite Settlements in North America, 1880s.

## Hidden Worlds





## Introduction

THE 18,000 MENNONITES WHO MIGRATED FROM THE SOUTHERN steppes of Imperial Russia to the North American grasslands 125 years ago did not, of course, comprise a hidden world. In fact, a rich historiography documents the coming of these conservative Dutch-North German Mennonites from New Russia (in present-day Ukraine) to Manitoba, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakota Territory between 1874 and 1879.<sup>1</sup> The move itself, involving a third of the entire population of Mennonites in Russia, was a “group” and not a “chain” migration, and thus drew a great deal of attention. Moreover, in Manitoba, the Mennonites received a highly publicized promise from the Canadian federal government for the right to transplant their sectarian ways on exclusive land blocs, with full military exemption and church-run schools. In the American Midwest, individual states offered military exemptions, and eager railroad companies provided enough inexpensive land that the Mennonites were able to recreate their highly visible farm settlements.

The Mennonites were also given public profile by their contemporaries, especially the American and Canadian presses. Newspapers highlighted the Mennonite communities’ unique physical characteristics. In Manitoba,

Mennonites defied the homestead system and, concentrating their efforts on two large land blocs, the East Reserve and the West Reserve, they re-established quaint farm villages, laid out the land strips of the complex open-field system, and built adjoining house-barns. In Marion County, Kansas, and Jefferson County, Nebraska, Mennonites made similar adaptations to the homestead system and built farm villages. In most places on the American plains, the Russian Mennonites lived further apart from each other, but were noted nevertheless for their close-knit communities, sturdy farm buildings, substantial wooden churches, large brick mills, and, of course, fields of Turkey Red wheat. When Mennonites described themselves to curious members of the host society, they listed the specific tenets of their sectarian Christian faith: they practiced a “visible” discipleship, including biblical pacifism, adult baptism, congregational discipline, and separation from worldly fashion. They also possessed an array of transplanted institutions: the democratically run churches, the parochial schools, the mutual aid societies, and, especially in Canada, the farm village councils. The physical and institutional features of the Mennonite immigrants, therefore, were broadly known. They were features that indicated that Mennonites were a transplanted people.

There is a dimension of the Mennonite story, however, that is less known than its public face. This was the dynamic and evolving everyday world that lay behind the institutional or confessional side of Mennonite society. This world suggested the Mennonite migration story was not merely the account of transplanted Anabaptists, who held an articulate religiousness and nurtured sectarian institutions. It was also a narrative of ordinary Mennonites who, in their everyday lives, created the cultural stuff—the relationships among people, the ways of understanding the world, the acceptable standards of behavior—that shaped an evolving Mennonitism, undergirded its cohesiveness, and ensured its longevity. Everyday culture ordered and gave meaning to the social relationships in the migration of Mennonites to the North American grasslands. It also directed the way in which Mennonites integrated into the North American economy and society.

In some ways, this approach, the history of the everyday, has become old-fashioned. Immigration history from the “bottom up,” filled with ordinary “flesh and blood” folk, was fashionable in North America throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century. This historiography’s focus was the local community and its method was the microanalysis of the whole range of human relations. Social history also made its way into Mennonite discourse. The leading Mennonite histories, including works by Frank Epp, James Juhnke, Ted Regehr, and Theron Schlabach, had elements of social

history intertwined with institutional church history.<sup>2</sup> And the social history of immigration and, specifically, of Mennonites remained a vibrant field of study in 2000 as it continued to be invigorated by new methods and new theoretical borrowings. During the 1990s, immigration historians, influenced by cultural studies, began to emphasize identity formation and even identity “inventions” of immigrant groups. According to this conceptualization, immigrant cultures evolved in specific historical contexts, reflecting inter-ethnic relations, transnational identities, imagined ethnic boundaries, and the cross-cutting variables of gender, class, race, and region.<sup>3</sup> Scholars also emphasized the malleability of group identities; that is, the ability of immigrants to fashion ethnic identity by writing about it in specific ways. Kathleen Conzen and others argued that “because the invention of ethnicity has been a process taking place within specific and concrete historical contexts, particular factors and contingencies impinge upon the process, accelerating, decelerating, directing and redirecting it.”<sup>4</sup> These approaches were reflected in Mennonite histories published at the turn of the millennium, including diverse works by Marlene Epp, Fred Kniss, Steven Reschly, and others.<sup>5</sup> In these accounts, Mennonite culture was not so much transplanted from the Old World, or maintained over time, as it was created in the very process of encountering new worlds and unforeseen circumstances.

Still, a social history that emphasizes the dynamic and creative dimensions of everyday worlds had not often been used to understand the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s. The reason was simple. Mennonites had been seen as “transplanters,” not as “creators.” Indeed, of all rural immigrants, Mennonites were often described as the least “creative” or “inventive.” They were the transplanters *par excellence*; they replicated old ways more often than they adopted new approaches. Mennonites, argued Conzen and others, possessed “less need for the invention of ethnicity, since the particularistic collective consciousness based on kith and kin continued to serve their needs for community.”<sup>6</sup> Dirk Hoerder’s 1999 portrayal of Canadian Mennonites as possessing “double ties, ethnic and religion, [thus] explain[ing] this group’s cohesion” is also correct.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the implication that Mennonites, unlike other groups, could transplant their societies to North American grasslands without much change requires tempering. The Mennonites may have seemed especially cohesive, orderly, deferential, and adept at institutional completeness. However, the new worlds they encountered in the 1870s demanded new articulations of social boundaries, new concepts of community, new strategies of household reproduction, new associations with neighboring groups, and new ways of approaching

markets. Ironically, these adjustments ensured the strength of Mennonite identity and community in the New World.

To understand the nature of the 1870s migration, therefore, it is important to focus on the change Mennonites were compelled to make. It was a particular kind of change. Using the ubiquitous botanical tree metaphor, I suggest the migration was neither an uprooting nor a transplanting, but a regrafting.<sup>8</sup> Migrants constantly struggled not only to insert old vines into new branches, but to determine which of the old vines were worthy of being inserted into which of the new branches. Immigrants chose old, inherited viewpoints, practices, and symbols to make sense of new realities in the North American grasslands. Fredrik Barth's description of cultural construction is helpful in explaining what the immigrants were doing in the 1870s. Barth argues that cultural groups possess a "surfeit" of cultural material from which they can borrow to "construct" their lives. The cultural material is thus both inherited and dynamic. Barth explains that "a person's reality ... is made from the knowledge and imagery available" to them and with this cultural material they interpret "the here and now so as to be able to respond to it."<sup>9</sup> The work of the scholar is not to "reveal a simplicity underlying a complexity," or some kind of coherent or essential pattern, but it is to understand "the work of social and cultural construction."<sup>10</sup>

This book is not a general narrative of the migration and transplantation. It is an examination of selected aspects of this relocation. The narrative is kaleidoscopic, and overlapping trajectories take the reader from the last generations in the Russian Empire, through the migration years, and into the first and even second generation in North America. The method varies from microanalysis of the social networks of a single immigrant community, to a general interpretation of inheritance practice and gender relations. It changes, too, from a broad portrait of life in the Mennonite community of the American Midwest to a comparative analysis of two Canadian communities. Chapter One, "Wonders and Drudgery," is informed by aspects of literary criticism, and analyzes diarists' perception of life on the Ukrainian steppe and their reconceptualization of everyday worlds during the transoceanic relocation. Chapter Two, "If Heirs of Grace How Much More of Temporal Goods?" is not only a discussion of how inheritance practices changed over the course of time, but a description of Mennonite conceptions of material wealth and of the way they used landed wealth to reinforce community solidarity in a time of flux, in pre-migration Russia, and in post-migration United States and Canada. Chapter Three, "The Potato Patch in the Cornfield," is a literary analysis of the worlds of the Russian Mennonite immigrant women in the American

Midwest; it argues that these women's letters in an immigrant newspaper revealed a confidence hidden to the wider world. It also argues that their attempt through letters to reconstruct mentally the increasingly far-flung Mennonite community blurs the domestic and public line said to separate the worlds of women and men. Chapter Four, "Mr. Plett and Mr. Bergey," is a comparative analysis of how immigrant farm families responded to new economic conditions and social realities in two distinctive Mennonite communities in the 1890s. Although one of the communities was a first-generation Dutch-Russian community on Manitoba's frontier and the other a third-generation Swiss-American community in highly developed southern Ontario, both developed strategies that ensured the farm household remained the foundation of the Mennonite world. Chapter Five, "Neighbors," examines four books on rural immigrant society in the United States—ranging from an analysis of a single Dutch farmer, to the composite world of German women, to the political culture of continental European rural culture, and to the economic strategies of midwestern rural families—and suggests that even the insular Mennonite immigrants lived in a multidimensional world. This world, shared with other immigrants, was part farm, part German, part continental European, and part capitalist. Ironically, these shared worlds have sometimes been the most hidden, despite the concern of ethnic historiographies to highlight the unique features of any given community.

To propose that this book will illuminate the everyday lives, those "hidden worlds," may seem presumptuous and just a little self-congratulatory. The fact is, however, that there were aspects of the Mennonite migration that historians of the past did not address. For one reason, sources available today were hidden a generation ago, during the Russian Mennonite centennial in 1974, for example. Since that time, archivists in both Canada and the United States have collected and identified many more personal documents, including diaries, letter collections, memoirs, and financial accounts. Recent work by social historians has also identified the usefulness of existing public information, including probated wills, tax rolls, homestead files, nominal census records, court dockets, and marriage records. Other sources known and even published in earlier decades—newspapers, inheritance protocols, diaries, local histories—have recently been used in new ways. These new ways, however, do not reflect a new competence of historians. Rather, they suggest that historians of yesterday asked different questions from those that historians ask today.

The information students required from history in the 1920s or 1950s or 1970s may be different from our requirements as members of a new



century. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the communications revolution impinges on society, thus turning an ordinary diary, described in Chapter One, into a cultural act in which understanding is mediated and social ideas legitimized. The tenuousness of inter-generational family and kin linkages, in what Eric Hobsbawm has called the “antinonian” and “demotic” *fin de siècle* cultures of the end of the twentieth century, makes the complex and adaptive inheritance practice outlined in Chapter Two important.<sup>11</sup> The concern for equality between the sexes takes gender construction out from behind community institutions, or, with reference to Chapter Three’s title, out from the “potato patches.” The globalization of capitalism and the inexorable march of urbanization spur the enquiry, addressed in Chapter Four, of how rural communities reproduce themselves under new conditions. The polymorphous and pluralistic postmodern world makes the experience of “other” farm communities—the Swedish, Norwegian, German, Dutch, and English—surveyed in Chapter Five relevant to the task of understanding the nature of Mennonite society.

These are the questions that seemed to stir my Mennonite Studies students at the University of Winnipeg in 1999, the 125th anniversary of the first arrival in North America of Mennonites from the Russian Empire. At the 150th anniversary, in 2024, there will surely be a new set of questions from a new generation. This book’s aim is to interpret the past with the questions relevant now. It also incorporates into this discussion the discovery of new sources and new theories. Most importantly, it seeks to discover from the lives of ordinary migrants the process by which cultures were created in new worlds. Knowing this process means knowing a central feature of the Mennonite migration of the 1870s.



Disembarking from the train in Meade County, in western Kansas, a second-generation settlement, in about 1906 (Dick Unruh, Meade City, Kansas).



The *Sardinian*, one of several ocean-going ships that brought Mennonites to Canada from Liverpool, England. Photo taken in 1875 (Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa).



Diarist Peter Hamm (1854-1901) with his parents, Katherina (Klassen) and Peter Hamm Sr. (1822-1900), taken in about 1887. The Hamm family migrated to the West Reserve, Manitoba, in July 1875 (Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg).



# 1.

## Wonders and Drudgery: The Diaries of Mennonite Migrants, 1857-1879

THE STORY OF THE 1870S MIGRATION OF MENNONITES FROM THE Russian Empire to the grasslands of North America has become standardized. Czar Alexander II, having embarked on a program of modernization, planned to abolish the social privileges accorded to Russia's foreign colonists, including their military exemptions. The pacifist Dutch-North German Mennonites were compelled to re-evaluate their sojourn on the steppes of New Russia, their home since the late 1780s. In 1873 twelve Mennonite and Hutterite delegates visited North America and, having examined lands in the western interior, they negotiated with Canadian and American governments and landowners to procure the lands that allowed for the compact resettlement of Mennonites. In both Canada and the United States, too, Mennonites secured some kind of exemption from military service. The sources for this story are many: they include records of government debate, church correspondences, newspaper reports, denominational histories, and personal memoirs.<sup>1</sup>

If the quest of the historian is to know the details of this migration, these public and published sources are crucial. If, however, the project is to know the mindsets and worlds of the ordinary Mennonite migrant, these sources

are less helpful. Often, such writings emphasize the elders' failed negotiations with the Russian government, the delegates' land scouting and land dealing, some of the migrant groups' limited financial resources, or the leaders' skill in re-establishing community institutions in North America. Since the 1970s, historical researchers have discovered a set of documents that illuminates important aspects of the way Mennonites saw, felt, and thought about their worlds. Those documents are private diaries. They are extraordinary accounts. Admittedly, they are often documents of daily behavior, void of emotional outbursts and introspection. In fact, the diaries, written in German and in the Gothic handwritten script, have often survived only because they were family treasures. Most of the six, pre-migration, Mennonite farm household diaries available for this study record daily acts of work and map the social contours of the typical Mennonite's world—household, kin group, village domain, congregation, and market. Most of the dozen or so travelogues examined for this study describe the migration to North America in the 1870s with a particular focus on the passage of time and the crossing of space.

This may be the reason why immigration historians have not often written about the daily diary. Their preferred sources of everyday life and the subject of literary analysis have been folklore, autobiography, letters, fiction, and even song lyrics.<sup>2</sup> These are the works of cultural vitality, dramatic interaction, and an intense dialectic. They are analytical materials that register the paths of immigrant integration. In a representative work on immigrant writings, Mario Maffi has analyzed a variety of artifacts, including novels, newspaper reports, paintings, songs, histories, photograph collections, even graffiti, and especially the multilingual, proletarian theatres of the Lower East Side in New York City. These sources, Maffi argues, revealed that neither linear assimilation nor static continuity occurred. Indeed, the Lower East Side's "closely-knit social texture, the variety of cultural influences, the daily struggle for survival, the many-folded stories of success and failure, the lingering, vivid memories of the Old World, the complex experience of coming to terms with America—all this required, stimulated and moulded specific verbal and literary expressions that were due to have consequences of the utmost importance."<sup>3</sup> In her analysis of similar writings in western Canada, Tamara Palmer has also noted a pathos and intense analysis: "The struggle with nature receives particular emphasis in novels dealing with [the rural] ethnic experience, perhaps reflecting the intensified sense of being alien which has been an intrinsic part of being 'ethnic' in Canada. The vast emptiness of the prairie landscape may seem doubly hostile and forbidding to one who has moved into a world that is

not only unfamiliar physically, but also culturally, with each type of alienation feeding on the other.”<sup>4</sup>

The daily diary does not possess this level of literary consciousness. However, its literary content promises to do much more than illuminate everyday routine. Indeed, daily diaries can serve several purposes for the student of the Mennonite migration of the 1870s. First, they can stand as an invaluable description of the often hidden social contours of Mennonite life in the province of New Russia just before the migration, revealing a social dynamic at which church rosters, newspapers, and institutional reports can only hint. Second, by juxtaposing these diaries of everyday life in New Russia to the accounts of the relocation to North America, the massive expansion of the migrants’ personal worlds can be documented. It is the travelogue, usually preoccupied with the passage of time and space, that nevertheless presents a mind actively analyzing and evaluating old ties and new sights, and is much more expressive of feelings of joy, fear, and hope. Third, a study of the daily diary allows the student of the migration to see minds working to order life in both the old and the new worlds, making sense of the drudgery of life before the storm of migration and grasping the extraordinary wonder of the relocation itself. Ethnologist William Hanks suggests that the very act of keeping this kind of diary, this “discourse genre,” is an act of imposing an order on an otherwise chaotic world.<sup>5</sup>

For the farmer of the pre-migration Mennonite colonies, diary writing was a subjective enterprise, but one without much contemplation, confession, or boast. The diaries of this study suggest that only by being dislodged from the established patterns of everyday life did the ordinary Mennonite begin to use the diary as an instrument of self-analysis and evaluation. During the migration, descriptions of drudgery were exchanged for portraits of wonder.

### **Daily Drudgery on the Southern Steppe**

The extant diaries describing life in New Russia were each kept by an adult, married man, and as such provide a gender-specific perspective (no women’s diaries were available for this part of the study). Moreover, each of the men lived in Molotschna, Bergthal, or Borosenko colonies during the 1860s and 1870s, and provides the perspective of a member of a cohesive, communitarian settlement. It did not matter that Molotschna Colony, founded in 1804, was the largest and most prosperous of the colonies, or that Bergthal Colony, founded in 1836, was the first of many daughter

colonies of Chortitza, the original or “old” colony settled in 1789, or that Borosenko was a small and freshly founded colony, dating only to 1865. The concerns of the men from these three colonies were similar. Each of the writers focused on the daily rhythm of life. Their diaries reveal a closed society, a mindset constantly concerned with agriculture and cognizant of the rich social textures of the community. They illustrate the very nature of personal relationships in rural Mennonite society, especially the structures of those encounters within the farm household. This preoccupation with household and community may reveal a lack of sophistication, but it also reflects an absence of individualism in a society that venerated communitarian values and in an economy that demanded corporate effort.

The first feature of most of these Old World diaries was a record of weather, the element most capricious and most unanswerable to human effort. Each of the writers seemed aware that weather and season were the cornerstone of agrarian existence in the continental climate of New Russia. The fixation with matters of temperature, wind, and precipitation, therefore, was not a sign of an idle mind. Clearly, when elderly Abraham Reimer of Steinbach, Borosenko Colony, noted the first sign of seasonal changes, he did so to remind himself of what could be predicted.<sup>6</sup> It was not unusual for him to record the first frost (for 1870 this occurred on September 23; that is, on October 5 in western Europe’s Gregorian calendar), or the first heavy snowfall (on November 18 in 1870), or the first “frost on the door window” (in 1870, on December 17).

But there was also a stoic resignation to the constraints and possibilities that weather changes brought. Weather aberrations could only be recorded, not altered. The cold snap of February 1871 was so severe that the temperature dropped to  $-25$  *Reaumur* (the French temperature system used in Russia, in which water freezes at  $0^{\circ}$  and boils at  $80^{\circ}$ ), and this in turn soon brought news of tragedy: “some forty Russians and forty horses” frozen near Nicopol and another “seven Russian workers” near Katerinoslav. The thunderstorm of July 1872 was so heavy that the water in the “river rose twenty one inches” and “went over the dam.” The snowfall of January 1874 was so intense that “Machlin’s sod house and hog barn were nearly covered.” Even the promises of good days—days with dust-settling “rain in the afternoon” or life-giving days that were “beautiful [and] sunny”—were recorded in matter-of-fact language.<sup>7</sup>

The preoccupation with weather was illustrated not only by descriptive phrases, but also by the sheer volume of text often committed to weather records. During the early 1870s, elderly farmer Abraham Reimer recorded the temperature twice a day—at sunrise and at noon; in the late 1870s, he

did so four times a day.<sup>8</sup> Significantly, too, half of the eight entries of Bergthal colonist David Stoesz's very sketchy diary for 1872 were related to a season's changes: the March 12 frost that "stayed in the shade all day," the March 16 drive of cattle and sheep to the pasture, the March 17 seeding of the first *desiatina* (one *desiatina* equals 1.09 acres or .44 of a hectare), and the April 9 release of the village stallion were statements that announced the passage of one agricultural season to the next.<sup>9</sup>

Those announcements had social implications. Records of season were closely linked to accounts of work routine—the efforts of all members of the farm household to secure its financial well-being. The richly detailed 1874 diary of Dietrich Gaeddert, a thirty-seven-year-old farmer of Alexanderwohl, Molotschna Colony, has been described by his biographers as a "valuable record pertaining to the coming of the Mennonites to America."<sup>10</sup> In fact, the diary stands as the richest known source documenting the everyday life of a landowning Mennonite farmer in New Russia. During the years between 1857 to 1874, Gaeddert recorded unusual events—a fire that destroyed half a village, a visit from a missionary to Indonesia, a trip to the Crimea, and crises in the congregation—but mostly his was an account of a farmer in tune with nature's rhythms. Reflecting Russia's Julian calendar, Gaeddert's diary documented January as the month of intermittent frost, when regular times of thawing weather forced farmers to capitalize on the cold days by taking out the sleighs and hauling grain to market. In February spring was present everywhere; cows and sheep gave birth, cattle were released onto pasture land, and by the end of the month, there was news of the first settler who had plowed his land. By the end of March, Gaeddert and all his neighbors were on the land; in 1872 it was at 9 a.m. on the 21st of March, to be precise, that Gaeddert "started working the land [by] plowing the back steppe with a three-share plow," and soon he had planted the first wheat, followed by oats, barley, and corn. In early April, as Gaeddert observed that "in the meadow the cowslips, violets and may lilies are blooming," there were other signs of new life on the farm: reports that "the brown mare" gave birth to a "brown male," and that the "Waldheim sow farrowed nine piglets." In May the sheep were sheared and sent to summer pasture, the winter's manure was spread on the summer fallow, the hay harvest was begun, and the first promise of a good harvest could be seen. Such a promise, of course, came with a hint of envy, for while Gaeddert noted that the rye on some village land came "up to under my arms, the highest up to my chin," he had to admit that "mine is shorter." June was the "heavenly month" when the weather was perfect with "everything very green."



The first of July marked a change of focus from planting to harvest. It was time now for Gaeddert to hire the “Russian” teenaged male and female reapers from the nearby market center of Tokmak, begin cutting the wheat, barley, and rye, and start hauling the grain to threshing floors on the farmyard. The crops were taken in succession, with the “new steppe land” first, followed by the “front boundary field,” “the back border field,” the “hilly field,” and the “rented land.” Frequently, too, there were side trips to the “melon patch.” During the hot, windy days of August, Gaeddert put horsepower to the treadmill and began separating the layers of grain, cleaning them of chaff and manure, bagging the clean grain, and carrying it upstairs in the dwelling house. Now, hoping for the right number of rubles per *chetvert* (one *chetvert* equals 5.95 bushels or 2.1 hectolitres), he took some wheat and rye to the local mill, and prepared to join a convoy of farmers to begin taking the real fruit of the harvest, cleaned wheat for export, some forty dusty miles away to Berdyansk, the port on the Sea of Azov. During September, if the right rains came to soften the earth, the stubble was plowed to prepare for the fall seeding of rye. October and November were the months to fill the larder with successive days of hog and cattle butchering. The fatter the pig, the better; three and a half inches of fat on the pork belly was an especially good kill. The cold days of December signaled to farmers that the time had come to settle financial accounts with neighbors.<sup>11</sup>

If the first concern, weather patterns, marked the limits of human agency, the second concern, the economy of the household, marked the art of turning nature to human advantage. Interwoven in the descriptions of seasonal work routines and weather patterns were records of yield and consumption. Both the elderly Abraham Reimer’s and the younger Dietrich Gaeddert’s diaries are rich descriptions not only of weather and work, but also of foodways and consumption. Pork and flour were the staples, but they were enriched with a diet of fruit—apples, grapes, and raisins—and vegetables, and there were special meals of fish and geese. Jewish pedlars, or Ukrainian merchants in Nicopol, Prischib, or Tokmak, also provided specialty items of coffee, sugar, vinegar, brandy, wine, pepper, syrup, and honey. Pork, of course, was produced each fall, and most of it smoked to last the winter and spring. Flour was ground at the local village mill whenever the farmers brought in their *pud* (16.38 kilograms or 7.4 pounds, probably one bag) of wheat, but for “white wheat flour,” trips to larger mills were required. Families, of course, were self-reliant for butter, and even elderly Abraham Reimer had enough arm-power to “butter ten times” in a single day in January 1873, producing an unknown amount of butter. As soon as the ice left the

rivers in March, the villagers descended to the water's edge with nets and began the "fishing" season that could last until June; others bought their fish from Jewish pedlars. By the end of June, the season's first cucumbers and "green" potatoes could be harvested, and by mid-July, the family added "fresh" potatoes and green beans to their diet. By the beginning of August, one was almost ensured the first large watermelons. Finally, in early September, the last of the vegetables—carrots and cabbages—were taken from the gardens. October once again introduced the hog-butchering days—with up to five pigs processed per day—and the seasonal cycle of filling the household larder began again.<sup>12</sup>

Although few farmers were as mindful as Reimer or Gaeddert of foodways, all emphasized the numbers that recorded the health of the household economy. Wage-labor costs, consumption rates, yields of produce, market prices, and interest rates all marked an effort to obtain a sense of control over the fortunes of the household.<sup>13</sup> Of special interest to each of these farmers was the booming wheat economy of the 1860s and 1870s. The farm's wheat sector, for example, was constantly monitored in Abraham Reimer's diary. Reimer carefully noted all the events of the harvest in the extended Reimer clan: the first cutting of the grain, the first harvest, and the first marketing. In 1873 son Klaas Reimer was first at everything: the first wheat was cut by July 11, the first threshed and cleaned wheat was carried upstairs to the house's wheat storage chamber by August 1, the first wheat was taken to market by August 4 at 6:30 a.m., and Klaas's entire wheat harvest was completed by August 9, on a partly cloudy day with rain at that. In comparison, sons Peter and Johann, and sons-in-law Abraham Penner and Abraham Friesen, were still harvesting in mid-August, and on August 18, when son Klaas was already harvesting his rye, hapless son-in-law Peter Toews was just beginning to use the treadmill to clean his wheat. Abraham Reimer also kept prodigious records of the wheat yield for each of the households of the Reimer clan and some records even among villagers: from twenty *desiatini*, Johann got fifty-four *chetvert*; from twenty *desiatini*, neighbor Heinrich Brandt received fifty-eight *chetvert*. And always, Reimer kept an eye on the market, regularly recording the price that a son, son-in-law, or neighbor received for wheat at the Dnieper River port of Nicopol. On 16 July 1871, farmers from Rosenfeld, the village of son-in-law Abraham Penner, received merely six rubles a *chetvert*, but on 20 February 1874, another son-in-law, Abraham Friesen of the village of Steinbach, reported he had sold wheat for 11.70 in Nicopol. Just two days later, neighbors Lemke and Peter Friesen sold wheat at the river port for 12.80 per *chetvert*.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the religious foundation of the Mennonite community, and the teachings against greed and accumulation, farmers also implicitly seemed to evaluate the economies of their own households against those of others. Farmer Peter Fast of Rückenau, Molotschna Colony, had less of an eye for weather and daily work than he had for measurements of economic well-being. On one trip in September 1871 to visit relatives in Zagradovka Colony, he recorded both good fortune and bad luck. On the 19th, he visited the family of Abraham Bose, who “have a full establishment [with] very good buildings,” and on the 21st, the family of Peter Barkman, “who have a Dutch wind mill and also good buildings.” But, between the visits to Bose and Barkman, that being on the 20th, Fast visited the family of “my cousin at [lot] number five,” who “has only half an establishment [where] everything is rather small,” and then proceeded to “my cousin Peter Isaacs at [lot] number one where the bread basket was apparently empty.” Occasionally, this concern with wealth could be riddled with conflict. When Fast applauded preacher Dietrich Gaeddert’s April 1873 sermon, “Silver and Gold Have I None,” as “wonderful,” he was aware of the social pitfalls of the booming wheat economy that increased property values beyond the reach of many and sometimes skewed trusted relationships. Among Fast’s pointed observations in 1873 was that the marriage of “Widow Franz Kroeker” and “Old Franz Wiens” may have been premised on the fact that “she owns a lot of property and he uses a lot.” He also noted that the only way in which schoolteacher Kornelius Penner could afford a farm was by buying one for 2000 rubles and then at once “selling half of it to his brother Johann Penner.” Here was a mind working to evaluate every aspect of community economics.<sup>15</sup>

## Social Contours in New Russia

The personal interest in matters of the weather and the household economy could easily extend into the wider Mennonite society. And, just as recording notes on climate and economy seems to have brought a sense of control over the immutable forces, recording notes on social networks seems to have lent a sense of predictability to social encounters. The diarists’ perspective of society differed, of course, depending on their ages, their places in the life cycle. But for each diarist, society presented itself in different layers: the family-based household came first, and then, sequentially, the extended family, the wider kin group, the congregation, the village, the colony, and then non-Mennonites in the region.



The 1872 diary of thirty-year-old Dietrich Friesen, a schoolteacher of Rosenfeld, Borosenko Colony, indicates the perspective of a young married man with, it seems, one small daughter, Trienche.<sup>16</sup> This was a time in the life cycle when most activity was intricately interwoven with the households of both sets of parents: Friesen alluded to weekly visits to wife Katherina's parents in Annafeld or to encounters with his own parents in Nicholaithal, twelve miles to the south. Then, too, Katherina maintained an intimate tie with her older sisters, Elisabeth Friesen Penner, age thirty-one, and Justina Friesen Unger, age thirty-six, both neighbors in Rosenfeld. And, reflecting the relatively young age of the Friesens, there were frequent visits either by Katherina's or Dietrich's unmarried sisters. By coincidence, both Dietrich and Katherina had sisters named Maria Friesen, Margaretha Friesen, and Susanna Friesen, which makes it difficult to determine the visitor's identity. It is clear, however, that important components of the young husband's and wife's social circle were their single siblings. A central feature, too, of the young Friesen household was an almost endless parade of uncles and aunts, fellow church members, and neighbors. During the first week of his diary, 20-27 October 1872, Dietrich named a social encounter for each day. On the 20th, "J. Penner of Friedensfeld" loaned Dietrich ten rubles; on the 21st, Gerhard Rempel and his wife dropped by for a visit; on the 22nd, following the church service, lunch was taken at Jakob Friesen's in Blumenhof; on the 23rd, Dietrich's father, Jakob Friesen, stopped by and together they drove to Annafeld to discuss an issue about a Mr. Wohlgemuth; the 24th brought a visit from the Schellenbergs; on the 25th, Dietrich and Katherina helped at the Schellenbergs' own butchering bee; on the 26th came a visit from friends Peter and Justina Unger; and on the 27th, Katherina's parents, Cornelius and Maria Friesen from Annafeld, visited.

The 1872 diary of sixty-four-year-old Abraham Reimer of Steinbach, Borosenko Colony, represents a different view of family. His world comprised regular encounters with married children. Abraham wrote most often about the affairs of his son Johann and his wife Anna of Steinbach, indicating that the elderly couple probably lived on Johann's and Anna's yard. But Abraham also regularly wrote about the households of his other married children in Steinbach: blacksmith, sheep- and wheat-farmer son Klaas and his mentally ill wife, surnamed Willms; daughter Margaretha and her husband, Peter Toews, the teamster; and son Peter, the carpenter and farmer, and his wife Elisabeth. They came regularly to help father or brother shoe horses, set up a barn, or return a borrowed cleaning mill, and on Sundays they came with their wives and children for *Faspa*, the light meal served in the late afternoon. The elderly Reimer also had weekly encounters

with his married son, Abraham, the blacksmith and farmer, and his wife Maria, who lived in the large village of Blumenhof, six miles south. There were weekly entries, too, about the three-mile-distant Rosenfeld daughters, Katherina and her blacksmith husband, Abraham Friesen, and the youngest daughter, Margaretha, and her husband, farmer Abraham Penner. Despite the distances, the Reimers clearly were a close-knit clan. Abraham not only recorded the activities of his grown children, he frequently visited them, even those who were a one- or two-hour walk away.<sup>17</sup>

No diaries of Mennonite women in New Russia before 1874 were available for this study, but the men's diaries reveal a perspective that placed great importance on issues of birth and death in the family. Diaries kept by men cannot, of course, fully illustrate a woman's life. In fact, births were often recorded in men's diaries without mentioning the mother's name.<sup>18</sup> The diary of Dietrich Gaeddert of Molotschna Colony was unusual in its record of the intense emotional qualities of an enterprise that mixed the joy of new life with the fearful threat of death. Indeed, Gaeddert turned his attention to his wife primarily during the very difficult times of childbirth. The birth itself could receive short shrift. On 31 January 1872, when Gaeddert summoned the neighborhood's midwives, "Frau Baergen and Frau Balzer," to his wife Maria's side for the birth of a son, Johann, her twelfth child, the entry was short. In fact, Gaeddert gave no more coverage to this event than to the incident on the same day when "the cow from brother-in-law Franz Martens had a female calf [bearing a] four pointed star [on the forehead]." The physical hardship that came after the birth of son Johann, however, received much attention. Gaeddert recorded a round of fever, diarrhea, bad cough, and "anguish" that solicited treatments of warmed brandy, melted white honey, and almond oil. Finally, on February 7, Gaeddert noted that "today my wife is, God be praised, quite a bit better, [having] slept quite well last night, and [having] bathed in Janzen's bathtub this afternoon." Still, his wife languished, and when on Sunday, February 27th, the Gaedderts hosted six couples, Maria suffered depression; Dietrich reasoned it must be "because of so much company." Another sign of a slow recovery came with Dietrich's admission in April that "this year my servant Klaas did all the seeding, I [did] none at all [as] my wife's illness and my injured foot prevented it." Still, the difficulty was no guarantee of relief from child-bearing; in fact, in August of the very next year, Maria gave birth to her thirteenth child and although Dietrich seemed delighted at the fact that "the little girl [is] ... an unusually white, heavy, fat, big child," he also recorded a very difficult birth and yet another round of fever, chills, and depression.<sup>19</sup>

The family, however, was not self-contained, but linked to the Mennonite congregation and village domain. Each of the diaries was a veritable road map of these social networks: each recorded the variety of church gatherings, the brotherhood meetings, and the many religious holidays that bound together the Mennonite community. Usually, these social interactions were recorded as a matter of fact. Visits were noted but not described; travels from afar registered but not evaluated. What the diaries did, however, was to witness the richness of social interaction. Consider David Stoesz's eight-entry diary for 1872; it had four notes on weather, but four others describing the social network of Bergthal Colony: a March funeral that drew people from other villages despite snow, an April trip with Mother as company to village Heuboden, an April letter to brother Peter, and a farewell to son Johann as he went to work in the village Schoenthal.<sup>20</sup> The diary of Abraham Friesen of Molotschna Colony in 1872 revealed in more detail the constant movement of Mennonites between colonies and among villages. On September 5, Abraham recorded a visit from the Friesens of Borosenko; on the 9th, a visit from the Ennses of the Crimea; and, during a four-week period in September, visits by himself to other Molotschna villages, including Rückenau, Muntau, Halbstadt, Tiege, and Fischau.<sup>21</sup>

The congregational network overlapped the village and colony interactions. But it was a society in which congregational unity was not measured by church attendance, which could be sporadic. In Molotschna Colony, Dietrich Gaeddert, who had been elected a preacher in 1867, not only attended service each Sunday, he summarized the contents of the sermons. It was a different matter with lay members. On three consecutive Sundays in October 1872, for example, young Dietrich Friesen of Borosenko Colony traveled to the specific village that was hosting the rotating church service. But then in mid-November, Dietrich missed church on Sunday to visit Nikolaithal, the village of his parents, and missed it also on the next Sunday when he drove to Annafeld, the village of his wife's parents. In December he attended church services on three consecutive Sundays, but then missed the next two Sundays, attended the next, and was absent for the next three.<sup>22</sup> The sporadic attendance is also apparent in Abraham Reimer's diary, which indicates he attended church services on about two-thirds of the Sundays. Not atypical were Abraham Reimer's statements for three consecutive Sundays in early 1870: the entry for January 18 read, "the service was in Rosenfeld ... [but] no one from [our] village was in the service"; the note for January 25 read, "Sunday, -21 degrees in the morning ... [and thus we] had no service today"; and the entry of February 1 indicated that "[we] had

a service here [in Steinbach, but] just a few [were] in the service [and] no song leader was present."<sup>23</sup>

Next in importance to village and congregation were the village and district political units. The diarists made references to picking lots to divide the hay commons, electing village mayors, impressing regional district officials, attending schoolteacher conferences, observing the end-of-year public-school examinations, and providing information to provincial censuses. But these encounters seem to be of tertiary concern for the Mennonite householder.

Indeed, members of other ethnic groups were more important than Mennonite village mayors or district officials in the everyday life of the Mennonite farmer. The rising capitalist wheat economy in the Mennonite colonies made the work of Jewish pedlars and craftsmen, German Lutheran or German Catholic neighbors, and Ukrainian and Russian laborers especially relevant to the daily life of Mennonites. This was true both for the members of the main colonies, such as Molotschna and Berghthal, and for those of the new colonies, such as Borosenko. Molotschna farmer Dietrich Gaeddert made annual notes in his diary about hiring Jewish cobblers; in September 1873 it was to make "boots" for sons Jakob, David, and Johann, sew "four pairs of half boots for the girls," mend "my wife's cork boots," and make "slippers for myself."<sup>24</sup> The elderly Abraham Reimer of Borosenko made regular references to the presence of German Lutherans. There were the traveling doctors who visited the colony and stayed overnight several times during the early 1870s. Then, too, the Lutheran neighbors, Machlin and Lemke, seem to have rented land from Abraham's son Johann and become close neighbors; there were purchases of piglets, sales of wheat, and even a reliance on Abraham's wife, Elisabeth, in attending the birth of Lemke's daughter one midnight. The note in November 1873 that two Lutheran families had joined the local Mennonite congregation was also indicative of increasingly close ties.<sup>25</sup>

The richest descriptions of inter-ethnic relations within the Mennonite villages, however, often involved Ukrainian and Russian neighbors. Both Abraham Reimer of Borosenko and Dietrich Gaeddert of Molotschna made frequent mention of these associates. Reimer noted how farmhands could easily be found at the "annual market" at Scharbach, where "many workers were available at low wages."<sup>26</sup> Gaeddert noted regular trips to nearby Tokmak; on one such a visit in July 1871, he successfully employed "three reapers at 425 kopecks" and "three binders at 375 kopecks." Later that year, he also hired two servant girls and two "Russian threshers."



Relationships between Mennonite owner and non-Mennonite worker were a mix of cordiality and conflict. There were moments of hostility, arising from broken labor contracts, thefts, vandalism, and inter-ethnic premarital sex. Gaeddert was clearly apprehensive when one day in June 1871 “our Russian servant feigned illness [and] when I went out to the pasture he left” or when in July 1872, “Krause’s Kornelius [had to be] banned by the congregation because of adultery with a Russian woman.” Even the easygoing Abraham Reimer observed frolicking youth with apprehension: the nature of offence of the “Russians [who in March 1873] came ... into the middle of the village and for half an hour did their things” is unclear. Abraham Reimer, as well as his neighbors, seemed especially upset later that year in November when news broke that “the oldest daughter of Martin Klassens from Annafeld, who is twenty-eight to twenty-nine years old, ran off with two Russians to Schardau, without anyone knowing about it.” But relations with Ukrainian and Russian workers also were often friendly. Abraham Reimer seemed to have had an implicit admiration for “Klaas Reimer’s Russian servant,” who, in July 1873, helped “our Friesen” kill a rabid dog with a pitchfork, for “the Russian” who discovered “Klassen’s buggy” in the flooded Bazaluk River, and for “the Russian” who gave Peter Friesen a ride to Borosenko after Friesen had walked half the sixty-mile distance from Molotschna. Dietrich Gaeddert also spoke with a sense of affection for “our girl [from Tokmak] called Lukire,” and for the fifteen-year-old Tokmak servant, “Hanna, the little one.” These were the daily encounters that marked that edge of the Mennonite community.

### The ‘Wonder’ of Migration

In sharp contrast to the Mennonite diaries depicting daily life on the southern steppe of New Russia before the migration years are the dozen or so extant diaries of the dislodged Mennonite migrants of the 1870s. Mostly travelogues, these diaries recorded much more emotion, pathos, and analysis than did the daily diary. It would seem that the transoceanic relocation produced a heightened self-consciousness, revealed in more intense record keeping. The travelogue reflected an attempt to order the chaotic world of uprooting, migration, and transplanting. It provided a clear sense of ethnic boundary, it articulated the shape of the migrating social unit, it legitimized the migration’s economic and psychological cost, it highlighted the symbols that expressed the hiatus of social relationship, and it possessed an implicit account of hope and reward. The travelogue was more than an

account of the journey. It was a statement by an immigrant making sense of a life marked by upheaval.

Coincidentally, frank analysis of the migration came not only from the migrants themselves, but from observers of the migrants along the way. The diary entries of two Swiss Mennonites, descendants of eighteenth-century migrants to North America, suggest that the willingness to record evaluative statements arose from the very act of encountering new circumstances. For the Swiss Mennonite diarists, the new circumstance was the encounter of migrants who were obviously of a different culture, yet of their own ethnoreligious group. In July 1874, Elias Eby, a retired Swiss-Mennonite Ontario miller, traveled from Waterloo County to nearby Toronto to meet the "Russians," the first group of Mennonite migrants en route from Quebec City to Winnipeg. They had arrived by train and were about to continue their journey by rail to the Great Lakes, by steamboat to Duluth, by rail again to Fargo, and then by riverboat down the Red River into Manitoba. Eby's comments cut to the chase. He was clearly impressed by the "innocent, peaceful and modest people" he met in Toronto; they were "cheerful and healthy" and sang in "soft and humble tones"; moreover, they bore the signs of good fortune, weighing from "180 to ... 250 pounds," and, most impressively, they "do not smoke," an adulation that Eby capped with three exclamation marks.<sup>27</sup> The second diarist was another Swiss Ontarian, a nineteen-year-old University of Toronto student, Ezra Burkholder, who, visiting his parents' newly established farm in Kansas in 1876, offered several unflattering remarks about the Russian Mennonites who had just arrived from Europe via New York and Chicago. He seemed especially unimpressed by one young "Russian" male who "gave venture to the most fouled mouthed oaths one could hear" and by a young "Russian" woman who came "to work [but] was slouchy and ... asked [an exorbitant] three dollars a week."<sup>28</sup> Clearly, like the travelers themselves, Eby and Burkholder were put into new social contexts that required their own mental ordering. The diverse comments the two men gave, one positive and the other negative, may reflect that Eby's membership in a Mennonite church required him to create a bond with these so-called fellow ethnics, while Burkholder, who, it seems, had joined a Methodist congregation, had no similar compulsion.

The travelogues of the migrants themselves demonstrated a similar willingness to analyze new faces and new circumstances. This is apparent from the very youngest of the diarists in this selection, nine-year-old Gerhard Doerksen of Fishau, Molotschna Colony, the eldest son of a migrating family. The journey seems to have stirred his imagination. He was especially

enthralled with the transoceanic journey. Gerhard paid special reverence to the power of the sea, noting how waves crashed onto the decks and how icebergs rose menacingly from the foggy waters. Other of his journal entries reflected the insecurity of the young boy. He lamented the ill health of the family, the seasickness of Father, and then of Mother, older sister Anna, and younger brother Bernhard. The worst was the tragic death in Liverpool of two-year-old brother Abraham. But the diary also displayed a special appreciation for space, time, and novel scenes. Young Gerhard recorded the exact miles the ship sailed each day—190 miles on the first day, Friday, May 23; up to 265 miles on Sunday, May 25; and as low as twenty-five miles in the fog off Newfoundland on June 3.<sup>29</sup>

The travelogues kept by adult men were more analytical. Clearly, the men were astonished at the signs of their expanding world. In a number of diaries of Kansas-bound men from Molotschna Colony, this theme seemed prominent. After migrant Heinrich A. Schmidt completed his journey, he appended to the top of his travelogue a synopsis of the distances between the major Russian and German train stations, and the costs of travel for each leg of the journey. He also added precise times of arrival and departure: “at 9:00 a.m. we came to Elbing ... 10:30 we are in Marienburg. At 11:00 a.m. we stop 15 minutes at Simonsdorf.” Schmidt greeted with curiosity the unusual sights, from the “large zoo” and “military arms exhibit” at Berlin to the fruit hawkers and “gun salute” in Le Havre, France.<sup>30</sup>

Farmer David Ediger of Nikolaidorf village and schoolteacher Cornelius Duerksen of Rosenort village traveled on the same ship, the *Teutonia*, that sailed from Hamburg for New York on 16 August 1874. The two men had similar perspectives to that of Schmidt, even though they employed different imagery. Duerksen seemed overwhelmed by the phenomenon of travel itself. Time and again he noted not only the passage of time and distance, but the speed with which the crossing occurred. The new scenes were interspersed with train changes, travel registrations, ticket inspections, border crossings, and the traversing by bridges and tunnels of rivers and mountain ranges. Outside Cracow (or Charkow, as he spelled it) on July 25, Duerksen noted that if all this travel had been by wagon he would have faced monotony, but as it was, “we seem to travel really fast.” On the 26th, the pace seemed to quicken and Duerksen now noted that “we fly through this world so fast,” and again, on the trip between Berlin and Hamburg, he wrote that although the “country is beautiful ... the train travels so fast that we do not see ... half of it.” Similarly, Ediger noted the passage of time and space, and also mentioned speed. He was especially struck on August 5, the second day of travel in the United States, by how “on American railroads

[trains] travelled very fast," and repeated the observation the next day as they crossed Ohio. Both Duerksen and Ediger seem rushed along the way. Border inspectors, train conductors, doctors, and sailors all ordered the travelers about. Ediger seemed indignant at being ordered on deck for regular fumigations and at the treatment his group received at New York's immigration entrepôt, Castle Garden, where "the doctor came and [we] all like sheep passed before him...." And on the 4th, after the terrible agony of seeing two small girls, Helena and Aganetha, possibly his granddaughters, die at Castle Garden, he was compelled to join his traveling party and rush on without staying for the burial. In the morning, after a full night's travel, he reflected pitifully that only "God knows how far we are from the little ones."<sup>31</sup>

The sights that churned past Schmidt, Ediger, and Duerksen also moved them to offer critical evaluations of their experiences in ways that stationary diarists did not. The most expressive of the migrant diarists, however, were two men who were bound for Canada, Peter Hamm of Bergthal village, Bergthal Colony, and Jakob Wiens of Kronsthal village, Chortitza Colony. These were the records of migrating colonists. They kept a keen eye directed to their first love, land, and a critical eye to a growing apprehension, the commercialized Germans and the industrialized English. From his railcar berth, Peter Hamm was especially observant of farming practices in the regions between Odessa and Hamburg: "poor [grain] except for the rye" on the second day beyond Cracow; "somewhat better" grain on the fifth day at Dueneburg (Dueraburg?); grain that "stands better here" on the sixth at Erkuhmen in Prussia. But then, on the eighth day, "the crops are looking worse again" and on the tenth, although noting that "grain crops look good," he dismissed German farm ways, especially its "general settlement plan," which "does not appeal to me for there are no organized communities." After passing Berlin and approaching Hamburg, he was even more certain, "all of Prussia ... do[es] not appeal to me in the least," although he added philosophically that it is "like that Frenchman who said, 'One can go east or one can go west, home is still the very best.'" If Hamm was apprehensive about Germany, he was disdainful about England. True, it had the massive factories between Hull and Liverpool, but everything was "black with soot." Moreover, the English were a "rough people," its youth "boldly impudent" unlike those in any "Russian city we passed through," its fields burdened with "wild oats," its wagons "poorly made and cumbersome," and its tobacco so bad and expensive that Hamm concluded he would "likely have to quit smoking."<sup>32</sup>

The observations of sixty-year-old Jakob Wiens, a venerated schoolteacher, were closely parallel to Hamm's. Even more descriptive, using



imagery, surprise, and foreshadow. Wiens sketched his analysis of the parts of Europe through which the Mennonites passed. He was astonished at the beauty of the mountain valleys of Galicia and Austria, "the broad valley clothed with a velvety green not known in our own country." But he, too, spotted the grainfields, "crops [that] do not look very promising" near Odessa, "grainfields [that] are lovely" near Podwolojijhska in Galicia, and "rye ... in the early stages of growth" near Berlin. But, like Hamm, Wiens developed little love for the English. On May 24, when the Wiens group arrived for the cross-England train ride to the ocean port of Liverpool, they were met by "customs officers [who] were quite rude," a behavior "rather typical of the people of England." On the trans-England journey, Wiens also observed more factories than "in the whole of Russia," but he, too, was unimpressed, for they spewed "smoke ... which causes a dense and dark atmosphere." On the train trip, Wiens's developing portrait of England was completed when he saw travelers who "are more brutal than any we met ... previously." The train station and seaport in Liverpool were even worse. Amid the unprecedented "density and smoke," there seemed to be complete mayhem; indeed, there was "so much tumult and noise ... screaming, whistling, switching of trains, people running back and forth, etc., etc, [that] one is reminded of the coming judgement."<sup>33</sup>

Hamm's and Wiens's antipathy to non-Mennonites was shared by a third Canada-bound migrant, young sixteen-year-old Jakob Koop of Neuanlage, Borosenko Colony. Koop, who noted that, as a result of a serious illness, "father could not look after anyone like other fathers," also began his diary on the occasion of the migration. He possessed an almost adult mindset, critical and apprehensive of unfamiliar settings. He, too, readily criticized strangers along the way: in Berlin "two young persons" tried to dupe the migrants into sailing on a New York-bound German ship; on the ship that Koop's party did take to Quebec City, the *S.S. Austrian*, the translator was "unworthy of commendation" and the sailors less than "benevolent"; upon arriving in Winnipeg, William Hespeler, the German-Ontarian immigration agent, assisted the newcomers with their purchases, but, as Koop noted sardonically, "probably sought not only our benefit, but also ... his own."<sup>34</sup>

At least two of these three Canada-bound men also wove into their narratives a religious text, which articulated their range of insecurities and assurances. For Koop, nature's wonders were reminders within the tumult of Europe of God's abiding grace. Upon reaching the Prussian border city that he referred to as Oszwium (Oswiecim or Auschwitz), Koop celebrated a "walk in the country" where "we received greater joy from the freedom of God's creation than from the many magnificent cities." And, in Berlin,

he noted that a walk among “beautiful gardens and fragrant growth gave us greater joy than the magnificent four and five story buildings.” On the ocean, he worshipped “the almighty hand of God and his sovereignty over creation [that] was most evident here” and, reflecting back, he confessed his disdain for industrializing Europe, where it had seemed as if “man were Lord of nature.”

Similarly, Jakob Wiens, who attached a short biblical verse to each day’s reflections, saw everywhere in nature signs of familiarity and the promise of divine guidance. Within the bedlam of Liverpool, Wiens yearned “to be back on the quiet land, where instead of noise ... we hear the song of the lark.” Even the menacing Atlantic Ocean brought a spiritual comfort to traveler Wiens. “The water billows surge up to 20 feet—or even more ... but in the distance the sun is smiling through ... remind[ing] us of the city of God [of] which we read in *Revelation*.” And when, off the coast of Newfoundland, Wiens’s ship actually struck an iceberg, damaging the ship’s railing and anchor, Wiens knew it was “God’s hand” that had kept the ship from sinking. Both Wiens and Koop thus created a safe mental passage to the New World; it was God’s hand in nature that took them through the forbidden lands to the safety of Manitoba’s East Reserve and West Reserve.

That the migration intensified a literary imagination is apparent from several diaries that possessed only sketchy household records until the first mention of migration, a point at which the diaries turned into detailed narratives. The diary of David Stoesz of Bergthal Colony reflects this phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> Like the diaries above, Stoesz’s recorded the romance of new sites: the “high mountain peaks” of Ireland, the “great rocky shores” of St. John’s, Newfoundland, the “astonishing redness” of the upper Mississippi River. But Stoesz was also spurred into diary writing by the heady events of the early 1870s, in which the sectarian world of the Mennonites became threatened by the Russian government’s military, educational, and civic reforms. For Stoesz, it was no coincidence that these reforms were announced at about the time of a spectacular heavenly sign, a frightening natural wonder. In fact, Stoesz’s diary commenced on 23 January 1872 with a description of a sign in the northern sky, one “of which the prophet Joel had prophesied ... [with regard to] the coming day of judgment. It was as the prophet foretold, in colours of blood and fire,” coming and going “as clouds rolling in great speed from the north and moving up overhead with many bright lights interspersed.”

It was a startling event. Coincidentally, on the very night that Stoesz made his observation in Bergthal Colony, schoolteacher Abraham R. Friesen of Molotschna Colony, more than sixty miles to the northwest, noted something

"like northern lights; at one place in the north it was a deep red ... but it spread very rapidly and was truly astonishing, for it became red right beneath Orion, and it had white patches and streamers from different directions, many of which went into the south and at ten o'clock, what actually looked like a star, formed above us with tremendous streamers in all directions." Friesen, too, was startled enough to speculate, "live to see what will happen in Russia," and then added something in a code displayed by a row of numbers.<sup>36</sup> Stoesz was more certain of the meaning of the spectacular aurora borealis. It signaled the "coming day of Judgement" and revealed that within the spiritually cold Russian Mennonite colonies, "the light of the [Gospel] was still alive," alive enough, it seems, to assure him that at least a minority of Mennonites would be true to their faith and take the spiritually purifying act of leaving their homeland and migrating to North America.

Other diaries mythologized the migration even more overtly. In his migration account, Abraham Hiebert of Alexanderwohl village, Molotschna Colony, left no doubt why, in April 1874, he had to go to the trouble of traveling to the seaport Berdyansk to ship a clothes chest containing an assortment of overcoats, trousers, skirts, and kitchen utensils, and a wagon containing a plow and carpentry and gardening tools, to America. The answer lay in the entry immediately following: "with a heavy heart we bade farewell to our old home.... God knows why we are allowed to take this important step. After being born in Russia and receiving much good here, the newly declared [news of a revised military service] law, forces us to leave our house and property." The departure was a bitter experience for Hiebert. He wrote that on the last day, "we surmounted the hill of Alexanderwohl with the rising of the sun," and felt such dejection that "the state of our feelings at the last view of our ... village is known only to God." At noon "it was necessary to board ... the terrible railway cars" and the rapid departure "gave us cause to cry to God for protection."<sup>37</sup>

Kansas-bound Peter A. Wiebe, probably of Annafeld village in the Crimea, created an even sharper antithesis to Russia. In fact, Wiebe, age twenty-seven, seemed prepared to pit all of an envisioned, oppressive Europe against a liberating America. The account, first made public in 1924 on the fiftieth anniversary of the migration, was, like the diaries of Koop and Hamm, filled with apprehension of Europe. True, Wiebe wept at leaving his mother in Europe, saddened that "I saw her for the last time in my life." Moreover, he had an emotional moment at a spot in his own village, beyond the school and garden, under a special tree, where he recalled an earlier time when "I had my prayerful conversion." But, as he left Russia and Germany, he bade farewell to "Old Man" Europe. As he passed the border between

Russia and Austria, he exclaimed satirically, "O Russia, to your health, you kept us captive for four months [delaying our exit visas], yet now we are free!" And as he sailed from Hamburg at sundown on August 15, he exclaimed again, "live well Europe, you have drawn much martyr's blood." For Wiebe, America presented itself not as a hostile land, but as one featuring the welcoming and familiar smiles in New York of "Elder W. Ewert and D. Gaeddert," who had preceded Wiebe's group. And the very first sight in Topeka included a familiar sight, signaling home and hearth: a "wagon filled with freshly baked bread."<sup>38</sup> Stoesz's aurora borealis-induced speculation, Hiebert's sunrise lament, and Wiebe's derisive quips marked the germs of an intense and useful mythology.

Women's travelogues in this selection introduced yet another aspect to the manner in which the migration was ordered through word choices. Women, it seems, were especially mindful of the social elements of the migration.<sup>39</sup> It may be that, because of their roles within the farm household, the migration was even more disruptive to their lives and offered a much greater expansion of their worlds than for the men who regularly traveled to regional fairs, sea and river ports, and government offices. Given these realities, the concern for social continuity may have been especially pronounced.

The diary of Maria Lange Becker of Gnadenfeld, Molotschna Colony, began at the time in 1877 when she, her husband, her five children, and her mother-in-law left New Russia for Kansas.<sup>40</sup> She was graphic about the new sights she saw and emotional about the people she encountered. Although Becker traveled with fellow members of the Gnadenfeld Mennonite Church, she expressed a sorrowful, heartfelt description of the moment of leaving Russia: "it was a difficult day for me [as] all [my] brothers and sisters remained in Russia.... I stood at the window [in the train] and looked back till I could not see our loved ones anymore. My heart was heavy, the tears ... flowed freely..." The same emotion was quickly directed to expressions of both awe and distress as the group moved beyond the familiar Mennonite colonies and to a whole range of new vistas, both pastoral and industrial. The intricate steel structure of a bridge over the Dnieper River was "a wonderful piece of work," and Austria's beautiful "high rocks, deep lovely valleys, villages, cities, streams and bridges intermingled" were, she wrote, beyond description. But overriding the awe of the sights were notes of distress and concern for social ties. "With all the tumult that surrounded us daily," she wrote, "I did not feel at home, and I often felt my soul long for quietness." The separation from her old community caused Becker to pray,



thanking "the Lord [who] has graciously protected us all," and to sing, repeating hymns that petitioned "Jesus only [to be] my journey's Guide."

But Becker did more than pray. She cultivated bonds of community while traveling. Indeed, she invented a Mennonite community en route to America, especially by writing of familial and congregational cohesiveness. Repeatedly, she turned to describe the migrating group and its individuals. Perhaps it was because the trip spelled a moment of family separation, perhaps because as a woman her life had been centered in child rearing and ensuring the family's health. She was especially sensitive to times when the well-being of families was threatened. Twice she described in great detail how near tragedy struck. The first incident was on May 29th at Cracow, when the "Reimers from Rosenort," with a small child in tow, dangerously tried to board a moving train. Another moment of terror occurred on June 2 near Arentsberg, when little Johannes Janzen, having "leaned against the door to look through the window," suddenly fell "through the door before the last tunnel." To make matters worse, the parents were unable to disembark until the next train stop, many miles from the accident site. Of both instances, Becker recorded emotional details of "shock," "fear," and, eventually, "great joy" when only slight injuries were incurred and families were reunited.

Unlike any of the other diarists, too, Becker emphasized the social aspect of the ocean voyage. She described the sleeping quarters, located "toward the front and close to the steps," consisting of "hanging double decker beds with wide slats without mattresses," and separated from other non-Mennonite migrating groups by only a "wooden wall." Here, within the bowels of her ship, amid a thousand fellow travelers, Becker created a mental image of a cohesive Mennonite community. The beds were occupied in the following order: "first come William Unruhs and Gosznern, then next Ewerts [of] Rosenort, then Balzers and Nickkels [of] Groszwiede, Janzens, then Edigers, and [finally] Hieberts and Buhlers of Berdiansk." During the most poignant moment in the intercontinental journey, the ocean crossing, her concern was not with natural sights, but with the framework of social cohesion.

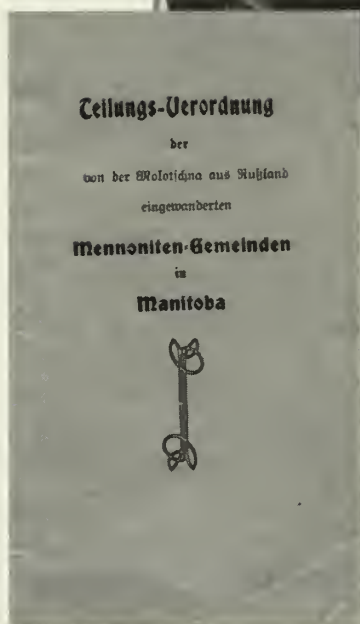
Two other immigration diaries by women emphasize social linkages in the process of uprooting. Here, a deep religiousness was interwoven with a deep ambivalence towards the new land. The diaries of Anna and Margaretha, the daughters of Cornelius and Helena (Friesen) Jansen, the prominent Mennonite merchant family of Berdyansk, the Azov Sea port, were emotional accounts by migrating women. They may have been especially penetrating accounts because they were written during the family's temporary

sojourn in Waterloo County, Canada, a time when father Cornelius Jansen and son Peter were often absent, scouting for a potential settlement site in the American Midwest.<sup>41</sup> According to their diaries for 1874, Margaretha, age twenty-four, and Anna, eighteen, were also responsible for the well-being of an ailing mother and younger siblings. If these events provoked strong self-awareness, an intensely emotional, pietistic religiosity, reflective of the culture of the urbanized Mennonite church of Berdyansk back in Russia, heightened that consciousness.<sup>42</sup> Margaretha and Anna hid no emotions. Both easily expressed feelings of doubt, fear, and loneliness, utterances of foreboding, and religious calling. Anna noted how, on Saturday preceding Easter Sunday in April 1874, friend "Mary and I ... painted some eggs and [sister] Margaretha laid some of them in the room for [siblings] Helena and Heine," but then added how, in the process, "we revived old memories and were homesick." And, having made this admission, she confessed, "I do not know very well why, but I am homesick very often." A religious holiday also made Margaretha remember the Old World. Her entry for 5 January 1874 recalled that "today Christmas is being celebrated in Russia. We thought much of last year and especially of our people, and I think that they in turn thought much of us also. This night I dreamt very clearly of Gerika and the little Aproska, and I was afraid for them." Her diary was an especially rich document that evaluated the characters and actions of the Jansens' Swiss-Mennonite Ontario hosts, and offered a record of fervent personal preoccupation. Anna and Margaretha Jansen's diaries are the most descriptive of the immigrant diaries, but, as with the other diarists of the 1870s migration, the very act of uprooting seems to have stirred them to write ardently and analytically.

Diarists who lived in the closed agrarian worlds of the Mennonite colonies in New Russia generally did not allude to Mennonite consciousness and infrequently offered social analysis of the Mennonite community. However, in the very absence of the sensational or of introspection, in the descriptions of mundane routines and predictable social patterns, the diarists provided an invaluable glance into the everyday worlds of rural Mennonites during their last decade in the Russian Empire. The content was important, but even more crucial was the medium of diary writing itself. In the act of diary writing, Mennonite farmers scanned the past, ignoring some events and highlighting others, and in the process they revealed their own natures, their self-identities, their sense of community boundaries, and the systems

of meaning by which they made sense of the incongruencies of the everyday.<sup>43</sup> Here was an attempt to order one's life in the face of the immutability of physical forces, the uncertainty of the market economy, and the amorphousness of social networks that could empower or undermine one's confidence. Here was an attempt by members of a cultural minority to survive within an often hostile, wider society. The diaries reflect their authors' determination that, within their households, kinship networks, and church congregations, Mennonites could continue to bring order to their worlds.

To juxtapose the mundane, everyday worlds in New Russia to the upheaval of the relocation is to expose the wonder the migrants felt as they traversed the world between the Old and the New. The diarists of the dislodged Mennonites, separated from the homogeneous and more predictable rural worlds of the southern steppes, freely recorded misgivings and apprehensions, and readily offered critical evaluations of people and place. These diarists were ordinary folk—a young boy, a teenaged woman, a young husband, a middle-aged farmer, an old man, a preacher, a mother—who left their cohesive Mennonite communities only once: during the migration from New Russia to North America in the 1870s. Each used his or her diary to create a mental passage to the New World. It was a pathway littered with inhospitable agents, sick children, menacing urban structures, panicky transfers, and apprehensive landings. In this flux, even the stoic Mennonite grew expressive. To simply record the facts of migration was not enough to process and interpret the wonder of the relocation.



Bernard Warkentin (1847-1908), front left, with other young Mennonite men from well-to-do families in Russia on a scouting trip in the United States in 1872. Warkentin, later a prominent miller at Halstead, Kansas, is said to have made the growing of Turkey Red wheat commercially viable in Kansas (Mennonite Archives and Library, Newton, Kansas).

The cover of an inheritance bylaw booklet produced by the Manitoba immigrants from the Molotschna Colony in Imperial Russia.



## 2.

### **‘If Joint Heirs of Grace, How Much More of Temporal Goods?’: Inheritance and Community Formation<sup>1</sup>**

IN A TYPICAL NEWSPAPER REPORT THAT ANTICIPATED THE COMING of the Mennonites from New Russia, the *Manitoba Free Press* in May 1874 noted that its readers could expect a community of “sober, industrious, peace-loving and devout” people. Mennonites were “late Anabaptists” who had taken their name from the Dutch churchman, Menno Simons, and now, three centuries later, they continued to “repudiate oaths, disapprove of war, reject divorce ... choose [preachers] from their own number ... reject infant baptism ... exercise [strict] discipline.” In 1874, the newspaper declared, the Mennonites were emigrating from Imperial Russia to protect those ideals.<sup>2</sup> This type of description was also found in newspapers in most American states in which Mennonites settled. Over the years these very characteristics have been emphasized by American and Canadian historians who have variously highlighted the Mennonites’ “rigid and uncompromising attitude in ... religious belief” and their rejection of “materialism and godlessness.”<sup>3</sup> This was the image of the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s. They constituted a community in which a religious faith emphasizing pacifism and simplicity was crucial in nourishing community formation and, indeed, in establishing a strong ethnic identity.

While religious faith undergirded the Mennonites' distinctive pioneer communities, so, too, did economic strategies. And, of the economic strategies, those pertaining to inheritance were especially important. The Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s transplanted a specific inheritance system. They came denouncing greed, consumerism, and wealth differentiation, and they preached that these traits were antithetical to true Christian discipleship. Still, an examination of Mennonite inheritance practices indicates that the Mennonites themselves were preoccupied with economic considerations and had a special interest in creating strategies of economic succession. Moreover, their own writings emphasized the relationship between the religious and the economic spheres. Documents known as *Teilungsverordnungen* regulated inheritance procedures for the Mennonites in Russia. In the preamble of these bylaws, their authors exegeted the biblical passage of I Peter 3:7, reminding men and women that if they were "joint heirs in the grace of life," how much should they be joint heirs "of the temporal goods."<sup>4</sup> In a document that Mennonite elders presented to the Russian government in the 1850s, another long-standing principle was articulated: "we are unable to depart in the least detail from our rules regarding inheritance ... [for] these regulations are closely connected [to] our religious beliefs and even based on them."<sup>5</sup> Mennonite leaders had no doubt that inheritance and religious faith were linked.

The inheritance practices the elders venerated ordered a set of social relations that echoed Mennonite religious values. In fact, Mennonite inheritance practices secured the very principles that had come to distinguish Mennonites over the centuries. This is because Mennonites carried to North America in the 1870s a culture of bilateral partible inheritance. "Partibility" meant that the estates were divided, often literally, into fragmented eighty-, forty-, and even twenty-acre parcels. "Bilaterality" meant that both sexes, girls and boys, inherited land equally. But the system was more than egalitarian; it served to secure the economic and social foundation of cohesive, Christian, frontier communities. This is because bilaterality ensured a degree of social egalitarianism generally, especially when poor boys married well-to-do girls, or poor girls married rich boys. Partibility guaranteed community cohesiveness and an agrarian existence for most—"better a bird in hand, than two in the bush," or, more formally, better a half-measure of existence on a small farm plot, than a possibility of a full measure in a faraway city. And both bilaterality and partibility propelled farm families who possessed an inherent need to bequeath land to the next generation to search constantly for new districts in which to settle;

the result of this was a culture open to the prospect of periodic, mass migrations.

### **From Friesland to Kansas and Manitoba over the Centuries**

It is a coincidence that those very regions in Europe that spawned lasting Mennonite groups had long-standing traditions of partitioning farms and offering equal inheritance to both males and females. It is a further coincidence that people of both the Palatinate and Friesland, the cradles of two enduring branches of Mennonites, the Pennsylvania stream and the Russian stream, practiced partibility. Two seminal works on the cultural consequences of particular inheritance practices, those of H.J. Habakkuk and George Homans, made their arguments with reference to these two regions in Europe.<sup>6</sup> In 1955 Habakkuk argued that bilateral partibility in regions that included the Rhine Valley had a number of social implications, including early marriages, greater fertility, denser rural communities, households of equal status, slow agricultural commercialization, a tradition of household craft rather than industrial development, and a proclivity for "sudden, explosive and permanent" migrations to new farming areas, rather than individualistic labor migrations to industrializing cities.<sup>7</sup> George Homans argued in 1958 that the Frisian system of bilateral partible inheritance, apparent in England's East Anglia, led to a culture of land marketing, cohesive village units, and a highly egalitarian society of low-status, "free peasants."<sup>8</sup> Ironically, this is the very outline of Mennonite society over time.

The Dutch-Frisian Mennonites who migrated to the city of Danzig and the Polish principality of West Prussia after 1540, their ancestors who first migrated to New Russia in 1789, and their progeny who came to western North America in the 1870s were all people committed to bilateral partible inheritance. When Dutch Mennonites faced severe persecution during the sixteenth century, they migrated eastward to German-speaking Polish lands; here, they were given refuge by local lords seeking skilled craftsmen and farmers who could transform a flooded Vistula River delta into productive farmland. Much has been made of the religious tolerance that Polish monarchs such as Wladislaus IV extended to the beleaguered Mennonites.<sup>9</sup> Important, too, for Mennonites were local agreements, sometimes known as *Hollanderrechten*, that spelled out the terms of their land tenure with local owners. These agreements, although often only for forty-year periods, did not deter Mennonite farmers from passing on

their leases to children, dividing their holdings into smaller parcels, and seeking new agreements with landlords in adjacent areas.<sup>10</sup>

The Mennonites' commitment to partible inheritance is especially apparent after the first emigration from Poland/West Prussia to the southern plain of the Russian Empire in 1789. Among the issues intensely negotiated with Russian authorities was the question of inheritance practice. Ironically, the Russian government offered military exemption and local political autonomy without question, but it balked at the Mennonites' request for partible inheritance. Russia's Land Ukaze of 1764 ordered a uniform, impartible, ultimogeniture inheritance (in which the youngest son inherited the farm) procedure for all foreign colonists, and an inheritance of only one quarter of the estate's value for a surviving wife.<sup>11</sup> Mennonites would eventually agree to the impartibility of farms, but won the right to divide the assets of the estate and to partition lands they had not received from the state. Important adaptations were required. Historian David Rempel explains that "due to their tradition of the equality of both sexes in matters of inheritance, the farm upon the death of the head of the household was auctioned off among the children. Whichever of them made the highest bid became the owner of the farm, the others being paid their share of the inheritance in money."<sup>12</sup> Within a generation of the migration to Russia, Mennonites began codifying these practices. One document notes that in 1810, the "estates partition regulations employed in our previous fatherland were compiled in a writing."<sup>13</sup> Several versions of the document seem to have existed; the older Chortitza Colony, founded in 1789, referred to its ordinance as a *Waisenverordnung*, as an Orphans Regulation, while the newer Molotschna Colony, founded in 1804, used the term *Teilungsverordnung*, a Partition Regulation. Still, both documents reflected the old Frisian principles of bilaterality and partibility.

These values were present in the earliest document available for this study, the 1810 *Waisenverordnung* from the Chortitza Colony in New Russia.<sup>14</sup> It is apparent from the very first line in the preamble that Mennonites tied inheritance practices to religious values: "not without reason does the Holy Scripture repeatedly exhort us to carry out what is just and righteous. This ideal was followed with a warning from the biblical book of Isaiah [10:1-4]: "Woe unto them that ... turn aside the needy from judgment, and ... take away the right from the poor ... that widows may be their prey, and that they [may] rob the fatherless!" To ensure that no injustice occurred, the first article demanded an urgent early step following a death: "within eight days after the death of a husband or wife, the village administration is to make an accurate evaluation ... of the estate" and

“promptly submit a detailed report to the *Waisenamt*,” the Orphans Office in charge of settling estates. The second step reflected a similar concern: even if only one spouse died, guardians were to be appointed to protect the interest of the children. In the event that it was the father who died, the widow, too, should have her guardian, a well-respected village man. And, to protect the patrimony of minor children from a dishonest stepparent, the division of the estate must occur before the remarriage of the surviving spouse or six weeks after the death of the spouse, whichever occurred first.

Within the article outlining this third step was another underlying principle that eventually attained religious meaning: “of the remaining property the testator or testatrix retains one half and the other half goes to the inheritors [the children] in equal amounts.” Yet, to protect the integrity of the farm and at the same time to comply with Russian law, the ordinance at once declared that “the [inheriting spouse], whether man or woman, in every case remains the possessor of the entire property,” and that “the inheritance of those under age remains ... [in the property] until the minor becomes of age.” But, in all circumstances, the surviving spouse was compelled to pay out the child’s inheritance in the spring during the “week of Pentecost” following that child’s twenty-first birthday. The ordinance’s lengthiest sections attempted to ensure that these principles of a “just” and equal inheritance were realized in every conceivable scenario.<sup>15</sup>

Was migration related to this inheritance practice? Economic historians suggest it was. H.J. Habakkuk, for example, explained that increasingly fragmented farmland, resulting from partible inheritance, produced community pressures that could translate into sudden, mass migrations in pursuit of new territory. At the same time, the promise of even a small inheritance of land could be enough to discourage individual emigrations and associations with the emerging industrial labor force. This is the very story of Mennonites, whether of Frisian or Palatine background. The Frisian, or Dutch, Mennonites readily considered the option of migrations to places such as New Russia and then to western Canada and the United States, and further to one of the many settlements west and south to Oklahoma, Texas, and Latin America. The Swiss-Palatine group would eventually migrate to Pennsylvania and then to Upper Canada and the American Midwest. George Homans argues that another consequence of this system is that partibility lowered the standard required for a villager to possess status. This, again, was an ideal realized within the Mennonite village, where all landowners, without regard to wealth, were full voting members of the village association and where all baptized male members were voting members of the church congregation.



Other consequences of bilateral partible inheritance have been suggested more recently. Liam Kennedy's study on inheritance patterns in mid-twentieth-century Ireland argues that particular inheritance practices ensure that "farm property flows along kinship lines ... [thus] insulat[ing] heirs from the full play of market forces ... [especially] ... the ultimate triumph of agrocaptalism."<sup>16</sup> For Mennonites, the ability to inherit farmland, or even small portions of a craft-based household, protected them from the pitfalls and lure of "the world," teachings they invariably heard in sermons. Martine Segalen has written about sibling relations in those parts of Brittany where an egalitarian system ordered inheritance procedures. She suggests that bilateral partible inheritance led to "constant and lasting competition amongst siblings" that also served to generate greater authority of parents over children, and, ironically, more cohesive kin groups.<sup>17</sup> Again, an explanation may be found for the Mennonites' ability to establish closely knit migrant communities with strict social boundaries.

There were at least two other consequences of partible inheritance. The first is associated with the practice of women inheriting land. Some scholars have argued this translated directly into "economic power."<sup>18</sup> While this is difficult to prove and certainly did not affect women's official status, the practice did provide women with a measure of autonomy after their husbands' death when they received one half of the estate. Then, too, in the event that one of the parents died, young women were guaranteed an inheritance payout upon their twenty-first birthday. More important for the survival of the Mennonite community was that land-inheriting women possessed leverages to ensure a relatively high degree of matrilocality, the act by which the husband followed the wife to settle in her village or district. Although that act may have conferred status on women, what is significant for this study is that such an inheritance pattern provided a landed existence for husbands of poor backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> This, in turn, added to the cohesiveness of the agrarian community and, indeed, to the community's ability to re-establish itself in new lands.

A final consequence of partibility arose from its very complexity and from the instability it lent to the nuclear household. The complexity of the system necessitated a strong community-based authority to oversee its execution. At least two thirds of the twenty articles in the 1810 *Waisenverordnung* outlined a role for a community-based organization, or for the involvement of neighbors: the *Dorfgemeinde* (the village association) evaluated the property; the *Waisenamt* (the orphans' association) oversaw the property's distribution and, for its services, collected a commission of 2 percent of the total estate; the *Gebietsamt* (the district or county organization) was



informed when surviving parents did not pay out the inheritance by the "week of Pentecost"; the *Bruderschaft* (the governing church council composed of all adult baptized males) became involved if banns of marriage were sought before the partition of the estate; the *Dorfschulz* (the village mayor) and four witnesses were required to attest to a couple's desire to write their own will; neighboring fathers, upon request, were required to serve as guardians of the children or the widow. In the process of invoking such an array of community organizations, the Mennonite community itself was made stronger. In the process, too, the household's economic strategies were placed under constraint of the inheritance authority. But perhaps most importantly, householders were required to be prepared to divide their assets at any time. Widowers, for example, could not count on building farm assets in an uninterrupted manner; children, upon reaching the age of majority, had a right to demand their share of one half of the farm's assets. The weakened household was the community's gain.

Over the years this 1810 Chortitza Colony inheritance ordinance and that of its sister settlement, the Molotschna Colony, changed and grew in complexity. The 1857 ordinance for the Molotschna Colony, for example, was 50 percent longer than the 1810 document, 3500 words and twenty-five articles in length. Its contents, however, reflected little substantive change. Clearly, the living standard on Mennonite colonies had increased. One of the articles now stipulated that before the division of the estate, the surviving spouse could claim a specified list of household goods: a bed, several blankets and pillows, a chest, a clothes closet, a set of "Sunday" clothing, and then a cow for a woman and a horse for a man. Reflecting economic prosperity, too, specific articles now provided for more than a third of the estate for severely handicapped children, the "mentally handicapped, blind, crippled, etc." who were unable to earn a living.<sup>20</sup> Now, too, the range of scenarios in the event of the death of both wife and husband, or of living descendants, had changed from a series of haphazard stop-gap amendments to a complex code that outlined in detail the meaning of ascending, descending, and lateral lines of inheritance. The substance of inheritance, however, remained unchanged.

### The 'Golden Age' of Partibility, 1874-1900

This intricate inheritance practice and culture was transplanted to Manitoba, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Dakota in 1874. Several factors enabled the first- and second-generation Mennonite farm families to enter what may be called a "golden age" of partibility, in which estates were

divided according to old practice with very few obstacles. In both the American Midwest and Manitoba, Mennonites encountered frontier settlements where an abundance of land enabled traditional land division. In both places Aboriginal nations had been ushered onto "Indian reserves" or "reservations," and the grasslands offered to the European world.<sup>21</sup> The Mennonite bloc territories of the East Reserve and West Reserve in Manitoba, and the railway lands purchased by Mennonites in McPherson, Butler, and Marion counties in Kansas, and Jefferson and York counties in Nebraska, were carved out of these "vacated" lands. And, as soon as these original lands were exhausted, a secondary diaspora took Mennonites to Saskatchewan, Alberta, Colorado, western Kansas, California, Oregon, and Oklahoma, where additional large tracts of land allowed for easy divisions of property.<sup>22</sup>

A second factor in the successful replication of old inheritance practices was Canadian and American laws. The Canadian government, in its attempt to lure Mennonites away from American land dealers to the harsher climate of western Canada, gave Mennonites permission to settle in land blocs. A June 1873 letter from Canada's Department of the Interior promised Mennonite leaders not only "an entire exemption from military service," but also a land "reserve ... for the exclusive use of Mennonites," with the implication that their traditional inheritance practices would be allowed.<sup>23</sup> In the United States, Mennonites seem to have been able to remain vigilant in maintaining the old succession rites simply because there were significant similarities between state laws and at least some of the Mennonite practices. Children were entitled to equal shares of an estate without regard to gender. After 1890, Kansas widows were able to claim absolute ownership of one half of farm property, with the other half divided in equal shares among all surviving children, boys and girls alike.<sup>24</sup>

Over the years, the Canadian and American Mennonites each faced hurdles in maintaining bilaterality and partibility. In Canada, women had no rights over homestead property after Dower, the medieval English-based right of women to one third of the property, was abolished in the mid-1880s.<sup>25</sup> Only in 1918 did Manitoba pass a Dower Act that provided women with rights to the farm, but it still fell short of traditional Mennonite customs. It merely provided that "upon the death of a married man ... the wife shall be entitled to an estate for her natural life in his homestead," meaning that she could not sell, mortgage, or gift the estate as she chose. Furthermore, she was absolutely entitled to only one third of the property: the Manitoba statute read that "the widow ... who[se husband] ... has not left her property ... of at least one third of the value of his net ... property,

shall be entitled to receive such share ... as ... shall equal in value one-third of the testators net estate..."<sup>26</sup> It was assumed a surviving male would keep the entire farm. Mennonite inheritance, by contrast, dictated that both women and men were entitled to one half of the estate.

A remarkable *modus vivendi* between the Manitoba government and the Mennonites who wished to practice the old system in the new land was required.<sup>27</sup> This "gentleman's agreement" allowed the estate of any Mennonite dying intestate to be administered according to Mennonite practices in the years before the 1918 Dower Act.<sup>28</sup> A 1902 document presented the Mennonite practices in the English language, presumably for the benefit of the Manitoba Surrogate Court. Clearly, the Mennonite leaders were aware their rules differed from those of the state. In the very first reference to the nature of Mennonite inheritance practice, they highlighted the egalitarian nature of their customs: "we consider it right, that ... all children, both sons and daughters, shall be joint-heirs share and share alike of the ... estate." Next, it referred to the Mennonite practice of compelling "widowed wives after their husband's decease [to] distribute only one-half of the whole estate amongst the children," not all of it, as Manitoba's law would dictate. Appealing to the Christian understanding of Manitoba's predominantly Anglo-Canadian legislators, the Mennonites also translated their exegesis of the biblical text, I Peter 3:7, forwarding the argument found in the title of this chapter: "if the wives are joint-heirs of the grace of life, how much more of the temporal goods."<sup>29</sup>

In the United States, the old system faltered soon after the migration of the 1870s. A search for *Waisenamt* protocol books, similar to the ones the Canadian Mennonites reproduced regularly between 1874 and 1913, has proved fruitless. Anthropologist Jeffrey Longhofer has offered an explanation for this dearth. In the Alexandervohl district in Marion County, Kansas, for example, the old *Waisenamt* and its church-sanctioned regulatory powers over inheritance are said to have ended when farm villages and the open-field system at the foundation of the village system came to a sudden end just eight years after settlement. The old inheritance bylaws had no place, argues Longhofer, "in a profoundly competitive agricultural economy [where the Mennonites] privatized production, purchased up-to-date agricultural equipment, and began the expansion of their farms."<sup>30</sup> In this economy, ideals of community cohesiveness gave way to desires for household strength, and the new culture quickly dictated that "a community institution need not concern itself with the affairs of inheritance."<sup>31</sup>

Still, evidence suggests that just as the Canadian Mennonites found ways of replicating the bilaterality of the old European system in the New World,

so, too, American Mennonites found ways of maintaining partibility in an economy that seemed hostile to it. Evidence from three, different, midwestern communities suggests a period of land fragmentation set in soon after the difficult decades of pioneering ended. Longhofer's research into land ownership for twenty-five families in West Branch Township, Marion County, Kansas, indicates that the initial average land area per household reached 261 acres after a decade or so and then declined sharply. A similar trend is apparent in another study of central Kansas. Although D. Aidan McQuillan concluded that Mennonites in Menno Township in Marion County and Meridian Township in McPherson County consistently had smaller farms than did neighboring French and Swedish farmers, his statistics also indicate that Mennonites began with the largest farms, which quickly evolved into much smaller units. In 1875 the average Mennonite farm was 185 acres, compared to farms of 160 and 164 acres for the Swedes and the French, respectively. After a decade the Mennonite farms had dropped in size to 141 acres, while the farms of their neighbors rose to 193 and 175 acres, respectively.<sup>32</sup> A third study for Cub Creek Township, Jefferson County, Nebraska, indicates that the sixty Mennonite families here owned an average of 97.3 acres in 1880, but only 63.4 acres in 1900.<sup>33</sup>

Other evidence, such as land ownership among Mennonite women in Jefferson County, Nebraska, supports the idea that midwestern Mennonites transplanted not only partible inheritance, but also bilateral inheritance practices. While Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora have argued that most German-American immigrant families considered equal division of estates as foolhardy, and Linda Schelbitzki Pickle has stated that most Germans from Russia "prohibited women from inheriting land ... for the first generations after migration,"<sup>34</sup> the same cannot be said for the Mennonites. In Jefferson County, Nebraska, for example, fifteen of the eighty Mennonite landowners in Cub Creek Township in 1900 were women and only one of these women was widowed.<sup>35</sup> An even closer examination of an individual household suggests it was the Mennonite inheritance practice that enabled this. In 1891, just after the death of his first wife, fifty-nine-year-old Jakob Klassen divested himself of 200 acres, almost half his total acreage. The land was divided equally among his youngest five children, ages thirteen to twenty-nine, including a fourteen-year-old daughter, Sara. His eldest daughter, Katherina, who had received her share of the land shortly after her marriage in 1879, received nothing. In 1896, when Klassen retired, he turned over the remaining 300 acres to his children, giving a piece to each child, including his two daughters.<sup>36</sup> The significance of this was that the Klassen daughters of Jefferson County secured matrilocal



households.<sup>37</sup> Inherited land attracted the husbands of the Klassen sisters to settle on the western side of the township in the Klassen village of Neuanlage. Tax and census records for 1900 show that while both Abram Rempel and Isaak Friesen, the two husbands, were residents of Cub Creek, they owned no land.<sup>38</sup> A letter from 1896 states that at least one of these men, Abram Rempel, "at the present is living on his wife's land near her parents."<sup>39</sup>

## Generations and Mennonite Inheritance Culture

During the second generation, additional pressures were placed on the Mennonite inheritance culture. In the United States, farming opportunities became restrictive and many Mennonite communities faced landlessness. Then, too, parents, concerned with the strength of second-generation farms, began granting land to only a few of their children, presumably providing other children with cash in lieu of land. Other families found themselves propelled to seek new sources of land in less fertile regions in western Kansas, Oklahoma, and Colorado, or to head north to Canada where homestead land was available in the newly formed provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.<sup>40</sup> Both phenomena were noted in Cornelius Cicero Janzen's 1914 sociology thesis, entitled "The Americanization of the Russian Mennonites in Central Kansas." Although Janzen made no reference to inheritance procedures, he observed two new practices that suggest the old system was unraveling. First, he noted that "there has begun a movement of old farmers to town," producing a "system of absentee landlordism to some extent. In many places the son or daughter lives on the parental place."<sup>41</sup> Absentee ownership of this type was foreign to the old system. All widows and widowers would have seen at least a portion of the family farm in the hands of adult children. Old ways of partibility also encouraged elderly parents to give land *inter vivos*; that is, to provide enough land during the parents' lifetime to assist adult children to begin their own farms. Janzen also observed that in central Kansas, "Mennonites migrate just as much as ever," once because of religion, now in 1914 because of "land hunger." Indeed, the migration had been so strong "that the population of the community [declined] during the past fifteen years."<sup>42</sup> It would seem that children were no longer waiting for land from their parents. Both circumstances, absentee landownership and community decline, suggest difficulty in maintaining the old practices.

Even in Manitoba, where commercialization of agriculture came slowly, there were signs of the end of old ways as early as 1913. In that year, the

largest of the four Mennonite *Waisenamts*, or orphans' associations, that of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, stated its members could not be compelled to abide by old inheritance practices as they "are not in agreement with the law of the land."<sup>43</sup> During the 1930s, when both the Sommerfelder *Waisenamt* and the *Waisenamt* of Manitoba's progressive Bergthaler Mennonite Church faced bankruptcy, the old practices no longer had the support of prestigious and community-based organizations.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, the smallest of the four *Waisenamts*, that of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite Church, maintained the old system until 1941, but then its protocol changed, to declare that "the government's estates laws shall [henceforth] not remain completely irrelevant," and that "it may become necessary to abide by the laws of the state."<sup>45</sup> These laws included Manitoba's Dower Act of 1918. Reflecting this Act, the Kleine Gemeinde's 1941 inheritance protocol radically altered the 500-year tradition of egalitarian inheritance. It now stated categorically that a partition of an estate should leave "two thirds of the clear assets [for] the widower, if he is the heir, and one third for the widow, if she is the heir...."<sup>46</sup> Only the *Waisenamt* of the old Chortitza Colony-based church, the Old Colonist Mennonite Church, would maintain its enforcement of the old practices, but it did so only through a mass relocation to Chihuahua State, Mexico, in the 1920s.<sup>47</sup>

Still, evidence suggests a continued commitment by many Mennonites to the old system of bilateral and partible inheritance. The continued land fragmentation and the contents of probated wills stand as signs of this continuity well into the third generation. Making wills may have been a new practice for Russian Mennonites in both Canada and the United States. Initial archival research indicates that Mennonites in the midwestern states began making wills shortly after arriving in the New World. Because of the congregational support for Mennonite inheritance bylaws, making wills in Manitoba did not begin until well into the second generation. First-generation Manitoba Mennonites who made wills tended to be the well-to-do who objected to traditional devolution practices. One of the first known wills in Manitoba was that of merchant Klaas Reimer of the village of Steinbach in the East Reserve. When he died in 1906, his will provided \$72,000 in assets to seventeen different children from three different marriages; it divided the immovable property so that his surviving wife received only farmland, and his children from his first marriages received the farmstead and store.<sup>48</sup> Over time more Mennonites began making wills, but they did so hesitantly. During the second generation, measured in this instance by the twenty-eight years between 1908 and 1936, only 177 southeastern Manitoba Mennonites probated wills.<sup>49</sup> But during the third



generation, 1936 to 1962, this number increased threefold to 525 probated wills.<sup>50</sup>

Did the practice of making wills spell discontinuity among Mennonites?<sup>51</sup> Certainly, there was a new context and a range of new concerns. Making wills sought to address specific family dynamics during a time of flux. When farmer Cornelius J. Classen of Kansas died in 1931, he left a will that protected the interests of his second wife, who “possessed considerable property in her own right which came to her thru her Mother’s estate.”<sup>52</sup> And, when farmer H.H. Enns of Manitoba died in 1944, his will expressed a specific concern that his children “care for mother to the best of your ability ... [and that] after she is gone [you] do not quarrel about the inheritance if there will be any....”<sup>53</sup> Despite these family-specific concerns, most wills maintained the principles of bilateral and partible inheritance.

Land records provide an overview of this practice. In part, they indicate *inter vivos* giving, in which children were granted their share of land inheritance during the lives of the parents. But they also confirm evidence from probated wills held in provincial and county courthouses. Mennonites continued to divide their lands into smaller and smaller units, even in times when commercialization made small parcels unprofitable. It is true that farm units themselves were increasing in size. Within Manitoba’s Rural Municipality of Hanover, once known as the Mennonite East Reserve, the number of “occupied farms” dropped significantly during the years following 1930.<sup>54</sup> But the number of parcels of land rose, suggesting absentee landownership arising from partible inheritance practices. On the twenty-one sections that comprise the Blumenort District, for example, the number of landowners rose from 78 in 1920, to 109 in 1950, even though the number of operational farm units had dropped to about 50.<sup>55</sup> Thus, whereas the average landowner in 1920 still possessed at least 160 acres, the old homestead measure of a viable farm, by 1950 that size had been cut by more than 50 percent.<sup>56</sup>

The experience in Kansas was similar. Here, this trend was even apparent in the western sections of the state, where large wheat-growing acreages were the norm. Again, the trend is apparent even during times when farm sizes were increasing. In Meade County, for example, the average number of acres seeded per farm household rose steadily over time, from 374 acres per household in 1915, to 409 acres in 1937, and to 462 in 1950. Surprisingly, however, as the size of the farm operations rose significantly, the average size of farm landownership decreased. County tax records indicate that the number of landowners was consistently higher than the

number of farmers; in 1937 there were 103 Mennonite farm households, but 141 Mennonite farm landowners; in 1950 there were 113 farm households, but 170 landowners. Ironically, during the same time that farm sizes increased, the size of land parcels decreased. In 1937, for example, only 13 of the 141 landowners held acreages of sixteen acres or less, while in 1950 that number had increased to 79 of 170 landowners. Clearly, as farm families fled the ravages of the southwest's terrible dust bowl and the restrictive post-war economy, they were not yet selling farmland. But emigration alone does not explain the number of small, unoccupied plots. Partible land inheritance does.

The wills themselves indicate that partibility remained a practice even as a farm economy dictated against land fragmentation. A close examination of wills probated for the Mennonites of the R.M. of Hanover in southeastern Manitoba between 1936 and 1950, and Mennonites of Meade County in southwestern Kansas between 1927 to 1945, demonstrates that rarely were parents bent on primogeniture, ultimogeniture, or, indeed, of privileging sons over daughters. In Manitoba, one of the rare wills that did privilege sons over daughters was that of farmer William Hiebert, who died in 1943, directing that his fox farm "shall all become the property of my youngest son William."<sup>57</sup> But Hiebert lived near Ste. Agathe, on the periphery of the Mennonite community, and his children were married to Anglo-Canadians. In Kansas, one of the rare wills that favored one child above the other also reflects an exogamous household. Here, in 1913, Sarah C. Flaming, a Mennonite, left the residue of the estate to "Jane A. Gray," perhaps a daughter married to an Anglo-American, and smaller amounts to her stepsons and granddaughters.

In most instances where the principle of bilaterality was undermined, it was not in favor of sons in order to protect the integrity of the farmstead, but in favor of daughters to repay them for service to elderly parents. Few wills said it as explicitly as retired Manitoba farmer Jacob D. Wiebe's in 1937. Wiebe willed "all my ... estate ... to my two daughters" because "they have attended and helped my wife and myself during the last years when we were sick and feeble."<sup>58</sup> In other instances, the will favored the daughters to compensate them for *inter vivos* giving to the boys. Peter H. Toews of Manitoba, for example, declared in 1937 that he wished to give his estate to his "ten children in equal shares, except [to] Abram and David who have already received their share."<sup>59</sup> Cornelius J. Friesen of Kansas declared in 1938 that his three daughters should each receive \$800 more than his two sons, for, as Friesen recorded it, son C.M. Friesen of Nebraska owed him \$767, while son P.J. Friesen of California owed \$2500.

In both Manitoba and Kansas, the majority of wills researched for this study prescribed bilateral partible inheritance. Most often the wills, whether probated in a Canadian or an American court, used identical words: farmer Jacob Bartel of Manitoba left his estate "to all my children share and share alike," while farmer John Friesen of Kansas left his estate in 1945 "to our beloved children, share and share alike." Often, the wills read as if they had come directly from the nineteenth-century Mennonite inheritance by-laws. In 1927 Abram H. Friesen of Kansas prepared a will that stipulated that "in the event that my beloved wife Maggie Friesen should marry again then all of the said property ... is to be appraised by three good and disinterested persons ... and [a] half value of [the] said ... property shall be paid to my children ... to be divided among them share and share alike and the other half [shall] go to my wife absolutely as her own property." It was similar wording to the 1951 will of Manitoba farmer Isaac F. Peters, who bequeathed the entire farm to his wife with the condition that in the event of remarriage she would divide the estate in two equal parts, one for herself and the other to be divided equally among eight children.<sup>60</sup>

Where there was a change to traditional practice, it was with reference to married women's rights. In Manitoba, the 1918 Dower Act seems, over time, to have become acceptable to the majority of Mennonites as women were increasingly accorded only a third of the estate or a life interest in it. On rare occasions, farmers even sought to deny the wife's limited right under Dower: "I deny [my second wife, Katherine] ... the right of Dower in my estate and ... leave her then one dollar," declared the will of David Doerksen in 1938, because she has "[n]ever lived with me, and [is] now residing since the year 1927 in Paraguay ... and [has been] unheard of ever since."<sup>61</sup> In some situations, Dower was used in tandem with Mennonite estate rules. Farmer C.D. Loewen of Rosenort instructed his executors to provide his wife with "all her rights under the Manitoba Dower Act," but then noted that the children's inheritance was to be divided "according to the rules of the Mennonite Church in Manitoba."<sup>62</sup> State laws fashioned the widow's rights; religious tradition, the children's. In most instances in which women were disadvantaged, it was with reference to the provision that granted them only a "life interest in," and not ownership of, the entire farm. Such wills inevitably stipulated that after the widow's death, the farm should be divided equally among all children. Thus, in 1938 Cornelius J. Friesen of Kansas instructed that upon his death, his wife, Anna A. Friesen, should receive the farm "during her life." Thus, too, in 1950 David K. Eidse of Manitoba left a will instructing that his wife, Elizabeth, take the home farm of 480 acres for "her use," but be prepared to grant each of her five

children an eighty-acre parcel upon their reaching the age of majority. The sum of Eidse's instruction was that his wife was left with an absolute ownership of only one sixth of the estate.

What is significant, however, is that although Mennonite women in these instances seem to have been left with less than they would have under the nineteenth-century Mennonite protocols, the farms still adhered to the principles of bilateral and partible inheritance with reference to the children.

In 1982 rural historian Mark Friedberger wrote that the process of generational succession of farm property had been "virtually ignored" by historians.<sup>63</sup> Over the years, this has changed and studies of rural inheritance practices have even focused on ethnic or immigrant succession practices. Works by D. Aidan McQuillan, Kathleen Neils Conzen, Sonya Salamon, and others have all demonstrated that German-speaking farm families in the American Midwest were especially committed to splitting their farms and passing land on to the next generation.<sup>64</sup> Much less studied has been the way in which inheritance practices were passed on from one generation to another within specific minority groups over the centuries. The commitment among Mennonites to partible and bilateral inheritance may have been a factor in predisposing them to consider migrating in the 1870s. Certainly, the values implicit in their particular type of inheritance practice secured the foundation of a cohesive immigrant community. Then, too, the practices of bilaterality and partibility were crucial in securing a viable, rural, immigrant community in North America beyond the first generation.

The inheritance practices that Mennonites brought to North America in the 1870s had deep roots. Mennonites who hailed from Dutch Friesland or the German Palatinate carried a tradition of inheritance from one country to another. Over time, the practice attained a particular ethnoreligious meaning. This system was considered to be a guarantee that Mennonite principles of egalitarianism and agrarian existence could continue. Mennonites also demonstrated the behavior that H. J. Habakkuk and others have associated with partible inheritance: community and familial cohesiveness, parental authority, avoidance of labor migrations, lack of status differentiation, and matrilocality. These social consequences of partible inheritance safeguarded Mennonite identity and their religious worlds over time. When partibility was threatened, as it was in nineteenth-century New Russia, or in twentieth-century North America, Dutch Mennonites adjusted the old practices for periods of time, but then, as resources allowed,



they reverted to strict application of the old Frisian principles. And even in their accommodation, Mennonites maintained significant elements of bilaterality and partibility. In Russia, farms were impartible but estates continued, in effect, to be partitioned. The first wave of Mennonite migrants to the Canadian prairies and the American Midwest in the 1870s found an abundance of land, which allowed for the immediate reversion to full partibility. After the passage of the Dower Act in Manitoba and the full commercialization of agriculture in both Canada and the American Midwest, Mennonites introduced a more male-oriented and male-driven inheritance agenda, but a strict application of bilaterality, providing equal portions of the farm to both boys and girls, remained.

This dedication to traditional principles may explain the remarkable ability of Mennonites to transplant communities to new lands. The reestablishment of Mennonite communities on the North American grassland during the 1870s, for example, was not simply a matter of transplanting Old World institutions. Nor was it a simple matter of receiving freedom to exercise their pacifist and sectarian religious faith. This chapter suggests an economic explanation for the longevity of Mennonite worlds. The Mennonites' traditional commitment to bilateral partible inheritance ensured relatively weak households and strong communities, a culture of land fragmentation that mitigated against urbanization and exogamy, and a mid-life practice of land searching in order to acquire the land base to make bilateral inheritance meaningful. The Mennonite inheritance system, therefore, prepared Mennonites mentally to accept the possibility of migration. It also ensured a cultural predisposition to accepting the authority of informal community institutions. And, it created a relatively high degree of social cohesion within the pioneer community.

An examination of the Mennonite inheritance practices over time provides an explanation for the achievement of the 1870s. Indeed, only an examination over many decades can illustrate the depth of commitment of the Mennonite pioneers to bilaterality and partibility. Only a longitudinal study can demonstrate that one such result was a strong foundation for the survival of a cohesive, rural community. If this explanation holds, then it was the very temporal world that Mennonites were said to disparage that ensured the success of the migration of the 1870s. Behind the face of religious piety was a world that knew that economic practice had social and cultural consequences. For the immigrants of the 1870s, economic practice served a religious imperative. Perhaps one can invert the reasoning of the nineteenth-century Mennonite elders and assert that "if heirs of the temporal, perhaps then of grace, too."



Members of an unidentified Manitoba Mennonite family in 1955 (Public Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg).



The family of Jakob and Maria Lohrentz in Moundridge, Kansas (Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg).



# Mennonitische Rundschau

und Herold der Wahrheit.

[Erscheint jeden Samstag.]

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No. 29.

## Geh' nicht allein!

Geh' nicht allein durchs Leben,  
So schwer ist dir der Dult.  
Bist du der Stärke geben,  
Denn du zum Mitleid bist.  
Es giebt ja viel zu Klagen,  
Viel Sorgen, Not und Pein.  
Nicht schwarzes Leid zu tragen,  
Geh' nicht allein!

Es wird der Hürde der Mühsal  
gen empfohlen, denn es wurden be-  
reits zwei Verhufe gemacht, ihn zu  
lösen. Auch haben andere Gemein-  
den ihm großen Gehalt angeboten,  
wenn er für sie predigen möchte, was  
er bis jetzt jedoch abgelehnt hat, um  
es mit den einfachen Leuten zu  
halten! —

statistisches Ueberblick über den Gang  
desselben in einem weiteren Arbeits-  
jahr, das hinter uns liegt.

Freies, sowohl die Rechnung als  
auch die Statistik legt Zeugnis da-  
von ab, daß der Herr auch in diesem  
Jahre wieder sich in Gnaden zu dem  
Vorteil bedient hat. Er hat zur ge-  
beutlichen Fortsetzung desselben die

Uns und unser Werk Ihrer fern-  
ren fürbittenden Teilnahme empfeh-  
lend, zeichnet sich hochachtungsvoll,

H. r. Wall,

den 12. März 1904. "Kinnou."

Kaufleuten, am Tage vor ihrem  
uns allen so unermüdet gekommene  
Gemeinnut (12. März) gekürzelter  
Bericht des lieben Bruders Wall H

Masthead of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*, founded in 1878 under the original name of *Nebraska Ansiedler*. The *Rundschau*, published in Elkhart, Indiana, served as the primary immigration newspaper for the Mennonites from Imperial Russia. In 1923, when it was relocated to Winnipeg, it began to evolve into the voice for members of the Mennonite Brethren Church who came to Canada from the Soviet Union in the 1920s (Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg).



The family of Jakob and Helena (Nickel) Koop of Neuanlage, R.M. of Hanover, Manitoba, in 1897 or 1898. From left to right: the hired hand (on the buggy), Jakob Koop and sons Cornelius, Abram, and Jakob Jr., Helena Nickel with son Peter, son Johann, and brother Peter B. Koop with team of horses. After the photo was taken, the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite Church, of which the Koops were members, forbade the taking of photographs and Jakob Koop hid the photo at the bottom of a chest until 1926 (*The Preservings* and Peter S. Koop, Steinbach, Manitoba).



The family of diarist Dietrich Gaeddert (1837–1900) and his wife Helena Richert Gaeddert. Dietrich migrated from Alexanderwohl, Molotschna Colony, to Kansas in 1874, the same year in which his first wife, Maria Martens, died. Gaeddert, at first a schoolteacher, became a farmer and in 1867 was also elected a minister. After arriving in Kansas, he organized the Hofnungsnau Mennonite Church and later assisted in the founding of Bethel College, Newton, Kansas. Dietrich and Helena were married in 1879. Dietrich had thirteen children with each of his two wives; eighteen survived infancy (Mennonite Library and Archives, Newton, Kansas).



Life in the Mennonite immigration sheds located sixteen miles north of Newton, Kansas, as depicted by an artist of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, New York (Mennonite Library and Archives, Newton, Kansas).



The subject of standard church history of the Mennonites, these church delegates are most likely at an annual or semi-annual General Conference Mennonite Church meeting at Alexanderwohl, Marion County, Kansas, in 1896 (Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg).



The family of Jacob and Karoline Brandt of Jansen, Nebraska, in 1902. Jacob came to the US as an orphan in the company of his uncle, Jacob Fast. At first a member of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite Church, Jacob Brandt joined the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church after marrying Maria Enns in 1879. After her death, he married Karoline Flaming and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church (Dick Unruh, Meade City, Kansas).

### 3.

## Potato Patch in a Cornfield: The Worlds of Mennonite Immigrant Women, 1881-1906

IN APRIL 1881, THE *MENNONITISCHE RUNDSCHAU*, THE THREE-YEAR-old newspaper that linked the 18,000 newly arrived Mennonite immigrants spread between Kansas and Manitoba with their far-flung relatives back in the Russian Empire, ran its first story written by a woman. It was a tentative beginning for women's writing; the editor had received the letter privately and decided on his own accord to publish it, although without disclosing the woman's name. It was not a controversial story, but it was dramatic enough, and both the way the story was featured and its content illustrate the position of the Mennonite woman immigrant in the American states that comprised her home—chiefly Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. In the story, a distraught Mennonite mother tells how she lost her seven-year-old, mentally handicapped daughter, Helena, one day while working a “potato patch within a corn field.” The story portrays Mother leaving her house late one afternoon to fetch fresh potatoes for a supper that had become too late. The potato patch lay 100 yards or so from the house, located in a ten-acre cornfield. She was accompanied by three of her daughters, who played in the tall corn while Mother pulled potatoes. When she was ready to return to the house, she called for the girls to



follow and then hurried back home. When only two of the daughters eventually showed up, leaving their sister Helena in the cornfield, Mother rushed back. She could hear Helena crying, but, given the tall corn and the fact that the other two other girls at her side also had begun crying, the lost girl's location could not be determined. And, by the time Father and the older children returned home from work in other fields, Helena had become quiet. As darkness descended, the family summoned neighbors and together they scoured the cornfield, lanterns lit, calling Helena's name. At midnight they gave up the search. Mother was very distraught and the night offered her little sleep. At dawn the search continued. And then, just as suddenly as Helena had disappeared the previous day, she reappeared. She walked from the cornfield, smiling and quite friendly, insisting that the tall grass of a dried creekbed next to the field had offered a fine repose for the night.<sup>1</sup>

This story underscores the standard image of the German-American "hausfrau." Hers was a life of domesticity, hidden, as the potato patch in the cornfield, from public view. Only in extraordinary times, such as the night when Helena went missing, was there any outside acknowledgement of her life. This view of the German-speaking woman of the Midwest is well documented in Linda Schelbitzki Pickle's book, *Contented Among Strangers*, Jon Gjerde's work on ethnic European mindsets and households, and Katie Funk-Wiebe's essay on images of Mennonite women in literature. Women acted within the domestic sphere. Granted limited autonomy, they worked silently as partners, gave birth to many children, and made mounds of food. Their worlds were circumscribed by the household, kinship network, and immediate neighborhood. Moreover, their worlds were made even more domestic by the interpretation they were given by male observers. Linda Schelbitzki Pickle lamented in her recent book on German-speaking women of the Midwest that historians "look ... in vain for the letters, diaries and memoirs of German-speaking women in collections of [immigrant] writings."<sup>2</sup> She speculated that illiteracy and exploitation were the root causes of women's silence and the reasons for the necessary attention given to male sources. Males did make observations. Government officials, immigrant colony visitors, social scientists, husbands, and fathers all projected their male bias onto women's lives. The women were seen as the historical actors in the "potato patch." Viewed from the cornfield, and perhaps even more distantly from the road passing the farm, they seemed silent, demure, and ineffectual.

The fact is that Mennonite women wrote many letters, privately and publicly, and these illuminate the nature of their gendered lives more

precisely than either broad generalizations of farm women or an undue reliance on sources written mainly by men. Such writings show, for example, that the Mennonite women's experience was conditioned by a number of intersecting factors. They sustain James Urry's argument that "gender is part of the matrix of belonging and should not be considered separately from other parts of social identity" such as generation, marital status, and social standing.<sup>3</sup> They support the view expressed by a scholar of Catholic Argentine farm women, Kristi Anne Stolen, who has warned historians of farm women to consider "a number of variables, such as the social characteristics of the household and the local community ... class, the family cycle, kinship ... and age, and religion and ideology."<sup>4</sup> For Mennonite women, a strong sense of Anabaptist history and a rudimentary literacy provided them not only with an ethnic identity, but with both the means and the permission to write publicly as women. The Mennonite sectarian ideology not only directed them to join the men in remaining separate from worldly society, but it blurred the lines between household and ethnic community, and provided them with a cultural agenda they shared with men. The religious value Mennonites placed on the self-sufficient farm household meant more than hard work for women; it gave them a sense of ownership that rivaled that of the men. The deeply rooted, egalitarian inheritance practices of the Mennonites not only provided women with land, but with the resources to ensure a degree of matrilocality and often to enable their husbands to farm.

Women's writings, indeed, suggest they often perceived a strikingly different world from that described by male observers. Men used their writings, sometimes boldly and sometimes by inference, to present a male view of the ideal woman's life. If the men were Yankee newsmen, they saw the Mennonite immigrant woman as a peculiar person, dressed in an austere and oblique fashion, silent, working doggedly and artistic only in their nurture of the ubiquitous flowers. Mennonite men who wrote to newspapers wrote of the dear sisters of the hearth, usually victims of misfortunes: disease, death in childbirth, insanity, domestic mishaps, rabid dogs, road accidents, and natural calamities—tornadoes, prairie fire, lightning, and horrendous rain. Women themselves described a much more multidimensional person. She could both embrace and contest her brothers, both honor and ignore her husband, and both console and chide her father. Her domain was the kitchen and the potato patch, but also the entire economy of the farm household. Her travels linked the farms in her neighborhood (the occasional trips to Russia almost invariably being taken by men alone), but her mental mapping took her along the vast and intricate network of

relatives and friends that the Mennonite diaspora had expanded so dramatically. She did this persistently in personal letters during the very first years in the 1870s. Occasionally, she did it in letters to newspapers after the community became established in the 1880s. More frequently, she created these images towards the end of the first generation; that is, as a secondary diaspora sent kin even further afield, from Oklahoma to Saskatchewan, and as nostalgia for the “Old Home” in the Russian Empire rose sharply. The more private the correspondence, the closer to the hearth from which she derived her power, the more expressive and assertive the woman became.

From the roadway, the potato patch was hidden behind the cornstalks; from within the household, it sprang to life. The great institutions that constituted the bulwark of American midwest immigrant society—the quarterly church conferences, the parochial schools, the mutual aid societies, the fire insurance companies—were strangely outside the scope of the immigrant woman’s expressed concern. The contours of life that preoccupied Mennonite immigrants in the everyday—the nuclear family, the household, the wider kin group, the neighborhood—were at the core of her narrated life.

### **American Pressmen and Mennonite Women**

The newspaper accounts of Mennonite immigrant women that were the farthest removed from their intimate worlds were, of course, those of the Anglo-American press. An examination of 125 American newspaper and magazine stories, collected by Kansas scholar Clarence Hiebert during the 1974 centennial of the Mennonite migration from the Russian Empire, reveals that little attention was paid to either the women or the children.<sup>5</sup> The newsmen interviewed the immigrant men and described their purchases, land negotiations, spending power, land choices, and smart-looking farms. There was immigration leader Peter Jansen, “an intelligent man” who was “almost thoroughly American”; Rudolph Riesen, the owner of the “prettiest and best improved prairie farm” in miles; Jacob Wiebe, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren bishop from Gnadenau, “a tall, powerfully built man” of “martial appearance”; and Heinrich Richert, a man with “bright eyes, square jaw,” and an obvious leader, given “the way he stood on his legs.”<sup>6</sup>

When women appeared in the many news stories of Mennonite immigrants, they were almost invariably silent, dour, and peculiar persons. Often, the observations were outright, or at least possessed hints of, ridicule. In September 1874 the *Beatrice Commonwealth* created an image of the

Mennonite immigrants that, a month later, became a national image when it appeared in the *New York Herald*. In the story, a skeptical newsman saw Mennonite immigrant women as “dressed in primitive, homespun garments,” resulting in dresses of “droll appearance.” The older women wore “funny old handkerchiefs tied round their heads,” and as for the younger women, the reporter was certain that “no Broadway milliner ever supplied the quaint bonnets which the fair Mennonite beauties wore.”<sup>7</sup> Similar hints of derision appeared in the *Marion County Record* when its reporter visited the Kansas village of Gnadenau in August 1876; in this community, declared the *Record*, “women and children dress[ed] alike ... as regards colour, blue is their favourite”; as regards the little girls, they “all wore long dresses ... ma[king] them look like dwarves.”<sup>8</sup> But the descriptions could even descend into the pointed mockery of yellow journalism: the *Red River Star* of Moorhead, Minnesota, reported in July 1875 that the town had been overrun by “raw Mennonite[s] ... bizarre—peculiar ... swarm[ing] from Russia ... mostly female ... hooded with [antiquated] bonnets ... [suffering] corpulency and great obeseness ... [exhibiting] homeliness and sham modesty.”<sup>9</sup>

Most reporters mentioned the hardworking nature of Mennonite women. In March 1875, reporters from the New York *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* traveled to Kansas to visit the Mennonite immigration houses sixteen miles north of the railroad town of Newton. Little was written about the women except that a “kerchief is the only headdress worn by women, and gay aprons ... their own vanity.”<sup>10</sup> But sketches accompanying this piece illustrate the gendered community the Americans saw. Outside the immigration sheds, most of the Mennonite men stood with their hands in the pockets of huge coats, one man standing prominently, feet apart, facing the newspaper man. In the background, silent, kerchiefed women, assisted by a single man, hurriedly drew water from a well. Inside the shelters, women worked diligently with children underfoot, while men stood conversing or writing. A single man in the faint background appeared to be serving a table of men and women.<sup>11</sup>

The newsmen seem ambivalent about the appearance of toiling women. “Slovenliness is not one of the faults of the sturdy [Mennonite] housewife,” reported an undated Topeka’s *Brown's Industrial Gazetteer* story on early Marion County life. But *Brown's* reporter was not entirely positive about female sturdiness: “In their treatment of women [Mennonite men] are less chivalric than our own countrymen, and thus while German wives are more healthy and robust than their American sisters, and contribute more to the material welfare of their husbands, they are less endowed with those



graces which we ... wish for in womanhood.”<sup>12</sup> When “graceful” Mennonite women were encountered, the reporters seemed delighted. In August 1875, a reporter from *The Commonwealth* seemed enamored on meeting the young, well-to-do Bernhard Warkentin, a mill owner from Halstead, Kansas. The reporter seemed especially taken with Warkentin’s companions, “his bride, a young lady ... and two brothers-in-law and a young sister of the bride [who] made a gay party.”<sup>13</sup> More pointedly, the reporter for the *Kansas Monthly* who visited Butler County in September 1880 commented that within one of the “solid, substantial comfort[able]” Mennonite homes, he discovered “a piano which a blushing bride had just brought with her to her new home.”<sup>14</sup>

Only in one area, the keeping of Mennonite flower gardens, were reporters uniformly, even if only indirectly, laudatory of Mennonite women. A reporter visiting Gnadenau, Kansas, in 1876 commented on the medieval appearance of this transplanted village, but devoted a special paragraph to the shame that Gnadenauers put “most of American towns ... [with their] prevalence of flowers, [enough to make] their yards [into] immense bouquets.”<sup>15</sup> In 1880 a *Scribner’s Monthly* reporter similarly contrasted the “random cabins of the [Yankee] homesteaders,” to the compact Mennonite villages with their “liberal front yard[s] ... filled with primeval and flashy flowers.”<sup>16</sup> Occasionally, the reporters even went beyond the flowers to meet the actual Mennonite female floras. The *Atkinson Champion* reporter’s 1882 visit to the Heinrich Richert farm of Blumenfeldt, one of the Alexanderwohl villages north of Newton, Kansas, was exceptional. Here, beyond “a large flower bed of intricate pattern, the property of Misses Richert,” stood the house, and inside the library was “Madame Richert, a very pleasant woman [who, gesturing] with ... a very pretty and small hand ... gave [us] the history of the older books which were brought from Prussia.”<sup>17</sup>

Aside from Madame Richert, few women in the Hiebert newspaper clippings came close to achieving public status. There was one heroine. In September 1880, the *Kansas Monthly* visited the Alexanderwohl villages—Gruenfeldt, Blumenort, and Blumenfelt—and sympathetically cited the cohesiveness, neatness, contentedness, and mutual concern of the Mennonite villagers. As evidence of the “affection they bear for one another,” the reporter told of a well-to-do, eighty-year-old widow who “had deposited her money in the bank, wanting a ten percent investment; but when she found that it had been loaned to farmers, she came back desiring that they should be charged only six percent.”<sup>18</sup> Her benevolence, however, was checked when the reporter failed to mention her name. The single



reference in which a Mennonite female exerted her will against that of a male was described with ridicule. An 1875 visit by *The Commonwealth* to the region north of Newton, Kansas, led a reporter to the Abraham Reimer farm, where he observed "a stout boy and girl engaged ... in stacking hay" and, as the reporter observed, with "the young lady officiating on top of the stack."<sup>19</sup> And, of course, she, too, was nameless.

## Mennonite Male Correspondents and Women

When Mennonite men wrote about women in Mennonite newspapers, women became sympathetic characters. They were often identified, albeit by reference to their husbands' names; they were known as fellow community members; often they bore hurt and loneliness, sometimes they rejoiced and were successful. Arguably, however, the peculiarly dressed, hard-working woman noted by the American pressman possessed little more autonomy than the sickly and often tragic woman created by the male Mennonite letter writer. In a typical early letter, dated April 1875, to the Mennonite newspaper *Herald of Truth* in Indiana, farmer John Fast of Marion County, Kansas, reported on the tragic death of two young women, one his twenty-nine-year-old married daughter, Helena Flaming, the other presumably a relative, but known only as the thirty-one-year-old wife of John Flaming. Ironically, she was the very woman who, eight days earlier, had assisted in the funeral preparations of Helena. No detail of their lives and persons, however, were offered, although it was noted that Reverend Jacob Wiebe, the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren elder, spoke at both funerals and that each of the deceased women had left their husbands with five children."<sup>20</sup>

Many other obituaries were recorded in both the English-language *Herald of Truth* and the German-language *Mennonitische Rundschau*. The two newspapers carried regular news of the immigrants of the 1870s. Alongside the obituaries were notices of sick women, inevitably referenced only by the names of their husbands. In 1883 alone, the *Rundschau* carried the following stories: in February, accounts of the illness of the wife of Gerhard Ewert, the asthma of the wife of Bernard Ewert, and the improvement to the health of "Widow Klaas Duerksen"; in May a story of the surgery by "the colored Dr. Flippen" on the wife of Heinrich Lorenz; in June a note published about "Widow Franz Funk's" deafness and her willingness to endure this burden; a report in August that the wife of Brother Arndt of Hillsboro was mentally ill and in September of her improvement after the

family's relocation from town to farm; and then in December an account of the growth that the wife of Johann Klassen had suffered in her side.<sup>21</sup>

Often, when men wrote about women, it was also a description of women who were either dependent on men or helpless in their absence. Often, too, the stories came complete with male heroes. A letter to the *Herald of Truth* in May 1877 recounted the plight of a poor widowed mother and her ten children in Dakota. One day the mother turned to her children and asked, "Children, what will become of us? The flour is nearly all [gone] and the hunger is very painful; what shall we eat?" When the small children could offer no satisfactory answer, the mother ended the meeting with the following declaration: "We will all pray very earnestly to God; he will send us a man who will help us obtain bread." As it happened, "the very next day a man came to see them and offered to lend them \$10 to buy flour with."<sup>22</sup> The September 1883 story of the recuperation of Franz Arndt's wife, after a move from town to farm, was not provided without Mr. Arndt's taking some considerable credit for purchasing a farm in kind response to his wife's heartfelt disdain for town life. Heinrich Lorenz's wife's health restoration was attributed to the surgical skill of "the colored Dr. C.A. Flipping," who surprised skeptics by removing a three-and-three-quarter-pound growth from the patient's arm. Even the tragic death, in 1875, of twenty-two-year-old Margaretha Jansen of the well-to-do and high-profile Cornelius and Helena Jansen family of Beatrice, Nebraska, was described in the Mennonite press with reference to brother Peter Jansen's heroic return home: he was "absent on business in Kansas ... [but he] had a presentiment which hurried him home and kept him there [even] though she seemed much better when he arrived."<sup>23</sup>

If men were the heroes in these stories, women were the vulnerable victims and sometimes even the culpable perpetrators of mishap. The stories created an uncanny association between men's absences and female calamity. In 1878 a German woman and two children were "barely saved" from a terrible death in a prairie fire in Edwards County.<sup>24</sup> In 1880 a fierce tornado destroyed a house in the Hoffnungsau district, hurting the "old widow who had sought refuge with three children" in the basement. In 1882 an eleven-year-old girl died after she fell from a horse on the very day that her widowed mother, Aganetha Entz, held her estate auction.<sup>25</sup> In 1883 the wife of Heinrich Gaebe broke a rib when she fell from a buggy she was driving through a dried creekbed. The year 1885 especially was filled with such mishaps. In February the widow of Klaas Hiebert grieved not only her husband's death, but also the death by lightning of her son Heinrich. In July, as the wife of Jakob Penner of Hillsboro, Kansas, stood by

the farm well, she was struck by lightning, leaving her alive, but causing lameness in her right hand and foot. In at least two other instances in 1885, male writers inferred blame on a mother for local tragedies. In February the wife of Johann Klassen in Gnadenau was lifting a pot of soup from the oven when she was bumped by her five-year-old child, which caused Mrs. Klassen to spill the hot soup over the ten-month-old baby, scalding it so badly that it died five days later. In December the wife of Peter Franz of Newton caused the family's chicken house and pig barn to burn after Mrs. Franz "let her daughter carry ashes to the chicken house." In one 1886 story, a mother's culpability is inferred in the absence of any mention of her: according to a certain D. Dyck, it was while he was "away [from home] studying" that his daughter was bitten by a rabid dog, forcing him to make a "terrible trip home" where, fortunately, the daughter recovered.<sup>26</sup>

There were a few instances in which men deferred to women. Occasionally, there was a female heroine. In June 1877, for example, the wife of John Hiebert was said to have thrown "herself over her little infant about two weeks old" as a "terrible whirlwind" destroyed her house and severely injured her husband.<sup>27</sup> There were occasional references, too, to women with a respected public profile. Inevitably, these were the female health providers, the practitioners of folk medicine that had been handed down through the generations. While our survey of newspaper accounts did not reveal any mention of the famed Sara Block Eitzen of Hillsboro, Kansas, who is said to have delivered 1800 Mennonite babies in the years after 1876, other general female doctors did receive mention, usually in highly positive terms.<sup>28</sup> In December 1881, for example, the Kansas news column in the *Rundschau* recounted the visit of "Die Tante Neufeldsche," Aunt Neufeld, of Minnesota, who had spent three weeks in the state, having "visited many sick people" and having established such rapport that the male correspondent declared, "We eagerly [would] have kept this experienced doctor in our midst."<sup>29</sup> In April 1885, there was another account of a "Frau Thiessen, who, having studied medicine with Dr. Louis in Peabody," had "accumulated [such] a good [corps] of knowledge" that she was able successfully to administer help to farmer Abraham Thiessen after his leg became badly ensnared with fence wire during a farm mishap.<sup>30</sup>

### Mennonite Women Writers and Newspapers

Reference to Tante Neufeld and Frau Thiessen, however, were exceptions among the narratives men wrote to describe female activity. Most often, those images represented women in paternalistic language, as dear sisters of

the hearth, and as victims of disease and calamity. These images, added to those of the peculiar-looking, hard-working woman drawn by the Yankee newsman, contrasted sharply to the image of the Mennonite woman inherent in letters to newspapers written by women themselves.

Among the female-written letters were images of women who had an authority rooted in a strong sense of belonging to the Mennonite ethnoreligious community. The women writers expressed no apology when they invaded the public sphere and they readily cast judgment, positive and negative, on the entire community. Sometimes they wrote with a general audience in mind, sending greetings to the wider Mennonite community. Sometimes the letters were simply general observations of the Mennonite people's good fortune or ill practice. In 1886 Anna Ewert of Hillsboro, Kansas, wrote to admonish those parents who "are so weak, they cannot deny their children anything," and a year later Katherine Janzen of Newton, Kansas, reported on the "splendid" accomplishment of three classes of Sunday School students, achieved through prayer.<sup>31</sup> Occasionally, women assumed the task of general admonition: Maria Funk of Lehigh, Kansas, for example, wrote twice within a six-month period, in July 1888 and again in January 1889, offering thoughts on "cross bearing" and on scripture reading.<sup>32</sup>

On several occasions, however, women wrote with stinging criticism of specific men. When, in 1889, Helena Janzen of Moundridge, Kansas, complained that she had spent some six fruitless months under the care of "Frau Doctor Neufeld" of Windom, Minnesota, she bore no ill will, nor did Doctor Neufeld defend the implicit charge of medical failure.<sup>33</sup> However, when Peter Giesbrecht of Landgon, North Dakota, complained in the *Rundschau* in 1898 that "Mrs. Johann Redekop of Manitoba" had suffered a complete mental breakdown because of the malpractice of a certain "female doctor," he was sharply countered by the very doctor. Giesbrecht's specific charge was that Redekop, who had been in a weakened mental state, had wished to stay in her bed to read and to sing, and had not been allowed this by the "female doctor." As a result, Redekop became increasingly weak mentally, declaring a wish to kill herself and eventually becoming completely childlike. What followed was a sharp rebuke from "Susie Isaac, M.D." of Winkler, Manitoba, who scorned "people who too eagerly desire to make ... their little sermon" without knowing the details of a case. Indeed, as Dr. Isaac declared, she had done the very thing that Giesbrecht had accused her of not doing; she had "shown the sick one the simple beliefs [Gospel?]" and ordered complete rest for her. Her defence



crescendoed with a declaration to Giesbrecht: "shoemaker stay with your own mould."<sup>34</sup>

A few women even wrote critically of male preachers who were accused of abrogating their responsibilities. In June 1899, a woman signing "your sister Helena Loewen" wrote a letter, "because my husband and several church members have travelled to the Quarterly General Assembly and I am alone at home." What followed was not a lament of loneliness or a complaint of being left out of an important church conference, but an 800-word exposition on "spiritual fruitfulness." The writing was not based on Loewen's dutiful Bible reading, but on her outrage at a story in the *Rundschau* of a well-known itinerant evangelist who, during the winter of 1898-99, had successfully been leading "souls to repentance" in Mennonite communities. Now he was in the front pages of the *Rundschau*, not for winning souls, but for having absconded with another woman. "I am overcome with [strong] feelings of pain, as I think of the fruit that he is said to have born, [and wonder] whether or not he was a branch of the true vine." The letter turned into an exegesis of biblical text and ended with a warning from the book of 2 John: "anyone ... who does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God."<sup>35</sup>

This criticism of a fallen man pales in comparison to another rebuke, one made by a woman to male leaders in good standing in the Mennonite church. In October 1904, a married woman signing "Maria Franz, Goessel [Kansas]" wrote to say that although she had no news for *Rundschau* readers, she had an admonition for those church attenders who mull over the business of the week during the first part of a sermon, and sleep during the second part of it. With just a little jest she declared that there is fire "in hell for all those who sleep through God's word."<sup>36</sup> Just five months later, Maria Franz wrote again, now, ironically, chiding not the sleepers, but the preachers. She had an idea for the content of their sermons. "Learned men" often speak about the end times, especially of the thousand-year reign of peace, but, she noted, "I think it would be a great blessing to many if these men would sometimes choose the theme of anger or harshness...." She was especially thinking of the ruthless treatment extended to cows and horses. Folks were easily lured into thinking they must purchase 80 or 160 additional acres, and then in a cash squeeze they were compelled to haul more wheat to town. Franz's concern was with the animals made to suffer: "ah, the poor horses," they had to do the hauling, but because of the debt arising from the land purchase, the animals received only half the normal rations and even faced reductions in water, which cost nothing. And, Franz noted in closing, these injustices are "done by so-called Christians [who]



regularly walk or drive ... to church, and are able to ... pray long prayers." Her final warning came from the book of Proverbs: "A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal, but the kindest acts of the wicked are cruel."<sup>37</sup>

Franz, Isaac, and Loewen were not typical of the women who wrote to the *Rundschau* during these years. Indeed, their letters represented a minority among the sixty-four letters ascertained to have been written by Russian Mennonite immigrant women in the American Midwest during the twenty-five years between 1881 and 1906. But here was a public voice that suggested a different role for women than that assigned to them by the Yankee newsman and the Mennonite fathers. The fact that these women wrote in a confident, even brazen, spirit attests to a culture that accepted this language as appropriate for women.

Arguably, even the women who wrote in a more demure spirit nevertheless revealed a social confidence that brought them out from the "potato patches." True, these letters were invariably referenced to the domestic unit, and usually extended to the writer's kinship network. In most instances, the letter writers sought to strengthen a kinship connection at a moment of crisis within the group. They wrote when a loved one died or fell ill, and they wrote to re-establish waning kinship ties. As the end of the century approached, as the first generation of pioneers began dying, as economic restrictions set in, and as internal diasporas became extensive in both the United States and Imperial Russia, the writing pace quickened. The audience, although potentially the entire Mennonite community, was often meant to be the specific members of the kin group who, over time, had become incommunicado. Women wrote these letters to re-establish lost ties. But in the process of writing, women did more than make links among relatives; they revealed their own social grounding. Their energetic attempt to shore up social foundations revealed a strong sense of self-respect in the community and an abiding confidence in their relationships with men. As the writers represented all age groups of women—the elderly widows, middle-aged mothers, teenaged girls, and even one young girl—it is clear the letter writers were not exceptional women.

The letters possessed a general character. Of the thirteen letters identified as written by women in the *Rundschau* during the 1890s, only one did not announce a death, illness, or tragedy in the family. Typical was the letter of Aganetha Penner of Buhler, Kansas, in December 1895: "It has pleased the Lord to take from my side on 18 September 1895 my beloved husband Jakob Penner, once of Rückenau, after a 10 day illness from *Lungenfieber* [pneumonia], age 71 years, 2 months, 5 days."<sup>38</sup> Less typical, but within the same genre, was the letter by Elisabeth Siemens of Inman, Kansas, who

began her 1893 letter with the abrupt notice that “death is having its profuse harvest,” leading to the passing of five mothers in her district—“our beloved mother,” “the wife of K. Thiesen,” “Sister Katherina Duk . . . mother of seven,” “Aunt Ens, formerly Brozke,” and “Brother Abram Siemens’s beloved wife.”<sup>39</sup> And even less common was the heartfelt plea by Sarah Wallman of Wittenberg, South Dakota, in 1890, wishing to be reunited with her husband, who had vanished while on a trip in Europe. She wrote that “a deeply grieving wife desires news of her husband, Franz Wallman, who in the year 1886 travelled to South Russia and who in 1887 sent the last message from Vienna with the notion that he was returning to his family in the United States.”<sup>40</sup>

These letters shared more than a common grief. Each was written with the hope of soliciting a response from the wider Mennonite community. In the very longest of these letters, a 3000-word piece in May 1898, Anna Dick penned a highly literate, intricate, heartfelt lament, intertwined with utterances of guilt and joy, and anxiety and despair, all over the illness of a daughter that left her crippled, and over a terrible accident that had left a son dead. The letter ended with a call to trust this God who was “totally breaking our wills.” Significantly, the letter was addressed to “acquaintances and friends, with whom in this difficult time it was not possible to correspond, but who, despite the great distance to the other side of the ocean, lie strongly in our thoughts and have sympathized and wept with us in our leading of God.”<sup>41</sup> Robin Cohen’s recent observation that a central feature of diaspora is a longing for the homeland evidently also applies to Mennonites, even though they embraced the biblical maxim that true Christians were pilgrims on earth, citizens of no country.<sup>42</sup>

This yearning for the homeland seemed to increase as the diaspora of Mennonites broadened at the turn of the century. As Kansas Mennonites spread out to the Dakotas, Saskatchewan, Oklahoma, and the arid plains of western Kansas, and as Molotchna Mennonites in New Russia moved eastward to the Kuban, Am Trakt, and Samara, letter writing appears to have taken on a new urgency. In 1901 Aganetha Schmidt of Kansas wrote on the occasion of news that her in-laws, the “Johann Goertzens,” had recently moved to “the new settlements in Eastern Russia.”<sup>43</sup> The very next year an Aganetha Schmidt wrote again, recounting a migration on the American side of the Atlantic—the move of the children of her brother-in-law, Johann Warkentin, to Oklahoma.<sup>44</sup> But within that letter were further appeals to relatives in Russia who had joined the general migration east and northward. There was an appeal for a letter, for example, from “Brother Jakob Suderman,” who seems to have moved to Siberia, at least to a place far to

the north where, in Schmidt's cliding words, it is so "terribly cold ... that your ink still has not thawed."<sup>45</sup> By the turn of the century, it was common for women to seek to reconnect kin members separated by diasporas on both sides of the Atlantic. Typical of such a letter is one written in 1901 by Katherina Fast, who had recently moved to Roschill, North Dakota, and who now sought to link up with her sister-in-law Katherina Kopp of Zagradovka, a sub-colony of the Molotschna Colony.<sup>46</sup> Typical, too, was a letter from Maria Wiebe, a young unmarried woman of Lehigh, Kansas, who, in July 1902, assured her cousin Jakob Boldt of the new settlements in the Ural Mountain region of Samara, later Kuibyshev, that the Wiebes still resided in Kansas.<sup>47</sup>

These were the letters of the turn of the century. Laden with lament and a concern about broken relationships in the ever widening Mennonite diaspora, the letters were almost invariably attempts to connect with the Old Homeland, "Die Alte Heimat." Only one such letter appears in the 1880s,<sup>48</sup> but twenty appear for the years from 1900 to 1905. Atypical only in that she signed her name with reference to her husband's name, "Widow Wilhelm Loewen" of Inman, one writer addressed herself to any knowledgeable reader of the *Rundschau* in Russia. She wished to know the whereabouts of any relatives of a Kansas woman, Maria Harder Loepp, formerly of Tiege, Molotschna Colony. The reason for the enquiry was that these relatives should know that Loepp had been trampled by a horse at a railroad crossing, leaving her scalp ripped open. There were other people from whom Widow Loewen wished to hear: "Watermillner Harder's children," whose mother had once been Loewen's classmate; Uncle Jakob Ens, the one married to Warkentin's Lies; Heinrich Neumann, the one whose wife was blind; her beloved brother Jakob Kliwer and Johann Warkentin, both of Ohrloff, Molotschna Colony, and both, too, who "have not written for a long time"; and Johann Wiebe.<sup>49</sup>

As often as writers appealed to relatives in unknown places to write, they mentally configured the geography of the dispersed Mennonite community. Mennonite female letter writers now mentally traveled the world. Take, for example, the narrative of Elisabeth Schulz of Loretta, South Dakota, who offered a brief history of herself. She wrote that she had been born in Gnadenheim, Molotschna Colony, but then had moved to a new colony in the east, after which she came to Nebraska. Later, she had moved to South Dakota and now, as she anticipated yet another move, this time to Saskatchewan, she turned her mind to Russia and mentally revisited the different sites of residence of her relatives: "so, first I go to Molotschna Colony, where I have two cousins ... who have not written in 19 years,"

and then she continued unrelentingly to pay tribute to a succession of relatives in Ohrenburg, the Crimea, and Auliata.<sup>50</sup>

Often, these letters displayed a pointed self-consciousness, especially aware of how the passage of time and the impossibility of transnational distance could affect relationships. In January 1901, for example, when Maria Peters of Henderson, Nebraska, wrote to announce that her father was the last of the five Epp brothers of Elisabethal, Russia, to die, and offered details of his excruciating paralysis, she did so aware that she had lost more than a parent. The last twenty-six years in the United States had passed quickly, she wrote, and now, after a generation of sojourn in America, "I am often in Russia with my thoughts, in a time a long time ago when we still attended school," and then added how much "I would also like to read something about my school sisters in the *Rundschau*."<sup>51</sup>

Many letters by women at the turn of the century carried similar sentiments.<sup>52</sup> The 1905 letter of Margaretha Rahn of Rosehill, North Dakota, was especially aware of both time and distance. Her letter began with the words, "as all our siblings and friends are in Russia ... so I would like to visit [you] through the *Rundschau*," and then explained that "we have been in America for thirteen years." Although she was married, kinship links held a strong allure: "I am completely alone in America," she declared, and then yearningly she reflected how, at the time of emigration, "my beloved siblings ... were ... all at home, yet today they are to be found scattered throughout the world."<sup>53</sup>

The search for relatives gave women a legitimate project in the public sphere. Only occasionally did the women write apologetically, suggesting, perhaps, they might be operating outside their legitimate roles. "As my dear husband, Hermann ... Fast, has many preoccupations ... I will try to connect with our friends and acquaintances of the *Rundschau*," wrote Aganetha Fast of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, in April 1900.<sup>54</sup> "As I read about my uncles ... in the *Rundschau*, I will be my father's substitute as he no longer is among us," wrote Maria Thiessen of Klein, North Dakota, in 1903.<sup>55</sup> Usually, however, these female letter writers possessed identities linked to broadly based kin groups, rather than to husbands or fathers: "As this paper goes to Russia, so our friends are hereby reunited. My name is Susanna Born, born a Voth from the Crimea," was the uninhibited and not atypical entry into the public forum of one female writer in January 1900.<sup>56</sup>

Aside from these mental excursions along the webs of kin, Mennonite female writers were focused on domestic sites. They rarely referred to the wider American world, to non-Mennonite neighbors, to town life, to state politics, or to national events. Occasionally, they did refer to non-Mennonites,



but they were usually the Mennonites' neighbors who had experienced some heart-wrenching familial tragedy. In July 1905, for example, Lizzie Quiring of Lamberton, Minnesota, related a tragedy in her community during the preceding week when a widow, facing abandonment by her son and realizing she "was poor and crippled ... drank lye and died."<sup>57</sup> But this was an unusual side trip. Female letter writers focused on either their kinship ties or on events based in their own households. They were concerned about the health of family members, visits from relatives, the purchase of new farmland, secondary migrations, and household mishaps among neighbors or kin groups.

The reference point in the domestic or household unit, however, does not seem to have restricted women. Indeed, it appears their identification with the domestic unit came in part from a confident association Mennonite women had with the economy of the family farm. Sometimes this link was expressed publicly. Aganetha Harder of Rosehill, North Dakota, used it as a lure to attempt to convince relatives in Russia to migrate to the United States. "We have 210 acres of land," wrote Harder in 1905; thus, "if the beloved father and sister were here, we could take good care of them."<sup>58</sup> In a similar vein, Margaretha Giesbrecht Rahn of the same North Dakota community wrote her relatives in Russia in 1906. To bolster her claim that "here in America, it is easier for pioneers to find land," she recorded not only the yield of the previous year's harvest, but hinted at the profit that would arise from "946 bushels of wheat, that is on the average 22 bushels per acre" with a "price that is good ... [at] 93 to 98 cents [per bushel]."<sup>59</sup>

At other times, detailed and knowledgeable reference to the farm was merely a way of commenting on the general well-being of the writer or that of her family. In June 1901, Aganetha Schmidt of Goessel, Kansas, wrote to say that "we are in the harvest and although in spring [the crops] looked very [promising] still the grasshoppers [?] have done much damage and for that reason the harvest will be only mediocre."<sup>60</sup> There were other bad-news letters, relating especially to inclement weather during planting and harvest times. But there were also positive analyses. A letter by an Aganetha Fast in 1900 was typical. It announced generally, to anyone caring to know, that of the hundred acres of wheat, twenty-five of barley, fifteen of summer fallow, fifteen yet to be seeded to corn, it was the thirty-one acres of winter rye that "stood very nicely."<sup>61</sup> These associations with the farm household, like the linkages to kinship networks, comprised the social capital that women expended in their excursions in the wider world.



With few exceptions, newspaper accounts describing the worlds of Mennonite immigrant women placed them in the privacy of the domestic unit; that is, in the "potato patch." Viewing that potato patch from the roadway, the American newspaper reporter described the Mennonite woman as a peculiar person. They were austere, silent, and assiduous persons. From the cornfield, the vantage point of the Mennonite man, the women were the weaker sex, usually victims of misfortune that could include disease, insanity, rabid dog bites, bad roads, prairie fires, lightning, or tornados.

From the potato patch itself came another voice. It was a call that claimed legitimacy by its very rootedness in the domestic sphere—the life of family, household, and kin. But this did not mean that the potato patch limited the agency of farm women. Rather, this social sphere legitimized a mental excursion far beyond the potato patch, and even beyond the cornfield and the public roadway. Armed with cultural data of that sphere—birth and death in the family, economic fortune in the household, news of migration of members of the wider kin group—immigrant women reached out to an increasingly disparate social network.

The network extended to the farthest reaches of the Mennonite diaspora, first linking the Mennonite communities in the American midwestern states to the Molotschna Colony on the Ukrainian steppes, and then increasingly connecting participants of the secondary migrations in both the new and the old worlds. Thus, as second-generation midwestern Mennonites made homes in Saskatchewan, Oklahoma, and western Kansas, Mennonite women reached out even more intensely to relatives in Imperial Russia who had themselves migrated, albeit in the opposite direction, eastward to new sub-colonies in the Russian Empire—Samara, Kuban, and Zagradozka. In these letters, published in public newspapers, women created a "virtual" Mennonite community in the flux of migration and diaspora.

Their voices were often lost in the cacophony of other sounds, those of male leaders announcing the workings of Mennonite institutions, male businessmen announcing new enterprises, and male householders exulting in unexpected yields or lamenting community tragedies. But female voices were there nevertheless, especially helping the dispersed immigrant community maintain its old links with family and friends. For Mennonite women writers, the potato patch was not really hidden in the cornfield; it was the very site from which they moved beyond, into the surrounding field and into the wider world.



David Bergey, New Dundee,  
Waterloo County, as a retired  
farmer in 1928 (Lorna Bowman  
Bergey, Kitchener, Ontario).



A woodcut published in George Grant's 1882 *Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is*. The artists, W.T. Smedley and E.R. Teichenor, depict a unique amalgam of exterior and interior activities of a pioneer Old Colonist Mennonite household on Manitoba's West Reserve during the 1880s. Mr. Jake K. Doerksen, Ile des Chenes, Manitoba, and *The Preservings* 18 (2001) identified this piece (Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg).

## 4.

### Mr. Plett and Mr. Bergey: Land and Social Practice in Two Canadian Mennonite Communities, 1890s<sup>1</sup>

COMPELLING THE MENNONITE MIGRATION WAS A LOVE OF LAND. Indeed, the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s expressed an almost obsessive interest in farmland. As immigrants, they debated its quality, and as farmers, they tested its potential. As neighbors, they treasured land if it was contiguous to the land of friends and relatives; as parents, they schemed for ways of acquiring more land. Their letters suggest they believed the immigrant community was successful if land, the foundation of a cohesive, agrarian community, was procured for each generation.<sup>2</sup> While Mennonites held no affinity to a particular land or country, historians agree that they firmly held to a “way of life that was rooted in the soil.”<sup>3</sup> Life on the farm had long protected Mennonite religious teachings against conformity to a wider world they equated with ostentation, avarice, vanity, and violence. Mennonite immigrants, therefore, saw land as a divine instrument. One Mennonite theologian, Waldemar Janzen, has described land as “a sacred plot by virtue not of any inherent sacredness, but of God’s choice of it as an instrument toward his purposes.”<sup>4</sup> But “instrument” and “purpose” were not always clearly distinguishable. Another Mennonite scholar, Calvin Redekop, for example, has argued that Dutch Mennonites linked the concept of

religious community to agricultural land and even a geographic territory: "The family of God and its land were locked in holy matrimony.... Where the church was ... central in the search and negotiations for land, the Mennonite moral code [held]...."<sup>5</sup> Yet another scholar, Nancy-Lou Patterson, has drawn the same link for Swiss Mennonites: "the spiritual state of blessedness ... [the] enjoyment of the divine presence [was] embodied in this [rural] landscape of polity, order and stability, created and inhabited by Swiss-German Mennonite settlers...."<sup>6</sup>

This veneration of rural life was central to the culture of the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s, and can be demonstrated by a comparison of Dutch-Russian migrants to their more established Swiss-Pennsylvania co-religionists, who had first come to North America in large numbers after 1710. In the late nineteenth century, significant differences marked the two main branches of Mennonites in North America: the Swiss and the Dutch.<sup>7</sup> By the 1890s, the Swiss were usually lodged in communities more than a century old and located in the densely populated eastern portions of North America—Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, and Ontario. The Dutch were just completing their first generation of sojourn in the midwestern sections of the continent's frontier—Kansas, Nebraska, and Manitoba. Despite these differences, the two groups of Mennonites shared a common culture. As Anthony Giddens has argued, the worlds of specific social groups must be seen in "social practices ordered across space and time," and in the very processes in which "agents reproduce the conditions that make these activities possible."<sup>8</sup> For the Mennonite immigrants and their descendants, the social practice of a life of simplicity, peace, self-sufficiency, and separation from worldly society, and the conditions that secured these "practices"—the farm household and agrarian community—were inseparable.

## Two Peoples: One Identity

The lives of middle-aged farmers Cornelius Plett and David Bergey represented two distinctive faces of the Mennonite experience in rural Canada during the 1890s.<sup>9</sup> Plett was a Dutch-North German Mennonite immigrant, having made the voyage from Imperial Russia to Canada in 1875. He spoke West Prussian "Low German," he lived in a wooden frame house attached to a barn by a common ridgepole, his wife wore a black kerchief, and his kinship network extended back to New Russia and into the American Midwest, especially Nebraska and Kansas.<sup>10</sup> Bergey was a Swiss Mennonite, a third-generation Canadian whose descendants had come north after the American Revolution. He spoke the South German dialect,

"Pennsylvanian Dutch"; his house was a stone construction detached from a massive, wooden, two-storeyed barn; his wife wore a white cap; his kinship network reached into the eastern United States.<sup>11</sup> Important, too, is the fact that the specific socioeconomic and physical settings in which Plett and Bergey lived were significantly different. Bergey was from Waterloo County in southern Ontario, while Plett lived in Manitoba's Rural Municipality of Hanover, also known locally as the Mennonite East Reserve.

Waterloo and Hanover of the 1890s were located in starkly different regions of Canada. Historians of southern Ontario have documented the decline of the independent "yeoman" in this region. Faced with the "urban challenge" and the spread of industrial capitalism in a myriad of small cities, rural society became threatened. Agricultural college programs, wilderness romanticization movements, and farmers' political parties were only some of the reactions to the rising urban-industrial society. In Ontario, too, a highly integrated, pluralistic society placed pressures of assimilation on non-Anglo Canadian groups.<sup>12</sup> Prairie historians, on the other hand, have noted how the independent farm family "made good" in an environment characterized by an abundance of land, low population densities, the wheat frontier, upward mobility from rising land values, cultural homogeneity within specific settlements, and relative isolation from the metropolis.<sup>13</sup> So different were such settings as southern Ontario and the prairie west that historians have argued that regionalism constituted a fundamental variable in Canadian history, and immigration historians, in particular, have suggested that regionalism mitigated against the development of pan-North American identities for any given immigrant or ethnic group.<sup>14</sup>

Bergey of Ontario and Plett of Manitoba shared similar, crucial "social practices." On the surface, regional differences affected their social behavior. Plett still lived in a homogeneous immigrant community, in a municipality almost commensurate with a land bloc set aside for the exclusive use of the Mennonites in 1873 (its exclusivity lifted only in the 1890s). The more highly urbanized setting of Waterloo increased the usage of English in the Bergey household, the level of interaction with the "outside" world, the Bergey children's pursuit of higher education, and the household's dependence on regional markets. Cutting through the regional differences, however, was a common dedication to the conditions that were seen as safeguarding Mennonite culture: the family-oriented farm household set in a closely knit, rural, sectarian community. This was the common link between Bergey of Waterloo and Plett of Hanover. Despite regional differences resulting in different descriptive cultural traits, Bergey and Plett shared



similar social aims. Ultimately, their lives diverged only in that they sought to establish the self-sufficient agrarian household and sectarian community in two distinctly different settings.

Comparing the social history of first-generation Manitobans and third-generation Ontarians is possible, of course, only with parallel sources. The 1901 Canadian census—both the nominal records and the published aggregates—provides the demographic base for this study. Tax records of Hanover and Waterloo from 1896 also offer parallel information, especially on Mennonite household economies. Parallel genealogical works enable family reconstruction. Most importantly, however, diaries kept by farmers like Cornelius Plett and David Bergey allow for a comparative study of the social dynamic in the Mennonite household. Both Bergey and Plett had neighbors who kept similar records during the 1890s, which permits the sketch of a wider context. David Bergey's father-in-law, Moses Bowman, in his seventies, and his acquaintances, Isadore Snyder in his thirties and Ephraim Cressman in his forties, also kept diaries in the 1890s. So, too, did Plett's acquaintances Abram M. Friesen, David Stoesz, and Johann Dueck, each in his fifties, but each from a different township in Hanover.<sup>15</sup> While tax and census records outline the structure of the Hanover and Waterloo societies, the diaries of these eight farm householders tell of Mennonite strategies to adapt to regional constraints and opportunities.

### **The Economies of the West and the East**

If these records identify a common set of Mennonite "social practices," they also reveal the different constraints faced by the Ontarians and Manitobans in securing those practices. Clearly, the Manitoba Mennonites faced fewer obstacles than did the Ontarians in maintaining the family farm and the closed sectarian community.

The Municipality of Hanover, for example, had the advantage of critical mass. It was, after all, a virtual recreation of the Mennonite East Reserve, the eight-township land bloc set aside in 1873 for the exclusive settlement by Dutch-Russian Mennonites.<sup>16</sup> Here, some 2000 Mennonite immigrants from the Berghthaler and Kleine Gemeinde congregations made permanent homes, while about 6000 other Mennonites settled in the West Reserve, sixty miles to the west. Although the exclusivity of the East Reserve was lifted in 1891, and Ukrainian and German Lutheran settlers began entering the reserve, Hanover remained a predominantly Mennonite enclave. By 1901 the 2373 Mennonites of Hanover still represented 79 per cent of the municipality's 3003 inhabitants.<sup>17</sup>

Waterloo County, on the other hand, had a polyglot population. In 1803, when Pennsylvania Mennonites acquired a 60,000-acre tract of land in the heart of present-day Waterloo Township, they secured the base for an almost homogeneously Mennonite settlement. Twenty years later, the Mennonite population reached 1500 people and settlements were extended westward into present-day Wilmot Township. But during this time, immigration from Germany and England changed the area's ethnic composition, and by 1838, when Waterloo County was established by statute, Mennonites no longer comprised a majority.<sup>18</sup> In 1901 the 5509 Mennonites of Waterloo County represented only 10.5 percent of the county's 52,594 inhabitants.<sup>19</sup> Adding to the difficulty of establishing a separate, agrarian Mennonite community in Waterloo County was its urban nature. Indeed, in 1901, when not a single Hanover resident lived in a town of more than 1000 residents, almost 40 percent of Waterloo County residents lived in such towns. In 1901 Hanover's largest town was Steinbach with 349 residents (97 percent of which were Mennonite); in Waterloo the largest urban centre was Berlin with 9700 residents (of which only 4 percent were Mennonite).<sup>20</sup>

Waterloo County was also more industrialized than Hanover. As early as 1856, Waterloo had been linked to Toronto by Grand Trunk Railroad, and, in the years after 1880, steep Canadian tariffs and an aggressive Board of Trade transformed Berlin into an industrial city. It became known for its furniture, clothing articles, leather goods, rubber products, and sugar.<sup>21</sup> By 1910 this industrial march was crowned with a link to the Niagara Falls hydroelectricity plant. Hanover, on the other hand, produced primarily agricultural foodstuffs, including wheat, oats, cheese, cream, eggs, vegetables, and meat, mostly for consumption in Winnipeg, a full day's travel away. Timber and firewood were the only other export commodities.<sup>22</sup> Although a railway had skirted both the east and west sides of Hanover by 1898, no railway was built through the heart of the municipality and not until 1908 was a long-distance telephone connection made to the outside world. Clearly, just as Hanover was representative of a pre-industrial, agrarian society, Waterloo County was an example of a rural community quickly becoming industrialized and urbanized.

Certain aspects of Mennonite social behavior reflected these different settings. The diaries of the Manitoba and Ontario farmers, for example, record strikingly different levels of interaction with the non-Mennonite marketplace. The diary of David Bergey records almost daily interactions with the merchants of nearby New Dundee and those of the more distant, but larger and more vibrant, Berlin. As a former schoolteacher, Bergey used

his education to serve a wider world with the writing of documents, mortgages, land deeds, and wills, but most often he left the farmyard as a regular farmer tending to the needs of the farm economy. In a single week in January 1900, he travelled to New Dundee four times, once to cut wood at Hallman's Mill, once to obtain chicken feed at "Ayr and Goldies," another time to shoe the hooves of Lady, Fair and Ab, and the fourth time to haul in oats and attain "chopping."<sup>23</sup>

Crossing social boundaries was not solely the venture of the middle-aged. Bergey's father-in-law, the seventy-year-old Reverend Moses Bowman, visited the outside world regularly in 1890. On one trip to Berlin in February, he "paid the Pole \$1.15 for mending shoes," and on another in the same month, he "deposited \$230 at the Bank of Commerce."<sup>24</sup> On the other side of the county, a younger farmer, forty-two-year-old Ephraim Cressman, also frequently crossed Mennonite social boundaries; he made almost daily trips to nearby Breslau and Bridgeport to purchase "choppings" and "middlings," and made weekly trips to the Saturday market in Berlin.<sup>25</sup> In addition to these market visits, Cressman interacted politically and socially in the wider region. During the course of 1890, for example, he attended a meeting of a "Farmers' Union" in Wilmot Township, a planning session of the Reform Party in Breslau, a political debate on free trade in Berlin, the nomination meeting for county reeve at the township hall, and a "heavy stock show" in Guelph.<sup>26</sup>

The immigrant farmers of Hanover lived in a distinctly different world. With the exception of monthly trips to the market in the booming frontier city of Winnipeg, and occasional trips to one of the French parishes bordering Hanover, most interaction off the family farm lay within the Mennonite community. Indeed, there were few trips to non-Mennonite places outside the municipality other than to Winnipeg. The only such trip noted by Cornelius Plett in 1895 was to Ste. Anne des Chenes on 23 December to purchase piglets; the only trip by the Mennonite bishop and farmer David Stoesz of Bergthal in 1890 was on 23 May, when he drove to St. Pierre to fetch Dr. Harrison for David Jr., "who had been sick for a week."<sup>27</sup> Farmers did sometimes encounter non-Mennonites within the boundaries of Hanover, but, in most cases, they were visitors or temporary residents interested only in business. The diary of fifty-seven-year-old farmer Johann Dueck of Gruenfeld noted such a transaction on 19 January 1891, when "four Englishmen stopped in at noon and fed their horses." He noted a similar exchange with a non-Mennonite on 20 March, when he "brought the Jew in Tannenau 4 chickens ... [and] 10 pounds of butter for payment for what I had bought at the auction sale."<sup>28</sup>

The immigrant Mennonites of Hanover were clearly afforded a sharper concept of ethnic boundary than were their more acculturated Ontario brethren. Trips to Winnipeg were monthly affairs, lasting three full days. And, these trips were undertaken for the sale of seasonal commodities, not for the purchase of daily services. When Hanover farmer Abram M. Friesen went to Winnipeg in 1895, his visits included four trips to sell potatoes, two to sell cattle, and nine to sell wheat.<sup>29</sup> Only occasionally did the Mennonite farmers of Hanover visit Winnipeg socially. Even when they did, there was a sense that Winnipeg lay outside the Mennonites' social purview: Reverend David Stoesz visited Winnipeg on 27 November 1894 in order to take "brother Johann Stoesz of Minnesota ... to see the sights and [to show him] that such a great city was to be found in this north country."<sup>30</sup>

Census records also show that the Ontarians interacted more frequently with members of Canada's host society than did the Manitobans. The census of 1901, for instance, reveals that fully 26 percent, 99 of 376 Mennonite households in the two most populated townships of Waterloo County (Waterloo and Wilmot), had a non-Mennonite servant or lodger, compared to only 6 percent of Mennonite households in Hanover.<sup>31</sup> The 1901 census also establishes a relatively high degree of exogamy and church abandonment among Waterloo Mennonites.<sup>32</sup> In fact, twenty-nine households in Waterloo and Wilmot townships in 1901 listed the religious affiliation of one of the spouses as Mennonite, and the other spouse, or one of the children or elderly parents, as either Evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic, United Brethren, Episcopalian, or Congregational. In Hanover there were just two such households.<sup>33</sup>

The ability of Waterloo County Mennonites to speak English also demonstrates they were more integrated with the wider society than were Hanover Mennonites. The 1901 Canadian census category, "can speak English," allows for a close comparison. Most Waterloo Mennonite churches and schools still used the German language in the 1860s, and the most conservative of the Waterloo Mennonite groups, the Old Order Mennonites, opposed the learning of English in the 1890s. However, knowledge of English was almost universal among Waterloo Mennonites by 1901.<sup>34</sup> In addition, at least a quarter of the Mennonite families spoke some English at home; by 1901, for example, 26.5 percent of Mennonite preschool children between the ages of three and five spoke the language. Hanover presented a different story. Here, critical mass favored the Mennonites; only the occasional trip to the market in Winnipeg, visits with the few Anglo-Canadian neighbors, and the teaching of English as a second language in



some of the schools offered an avenue to learn English. Thus, by 1901, 74 percent of Hanover Mennonite men had learned some English, while only 27 percent of the women spoke the language. Moreover, not a single Hanover child between ages three and five was able to speak English in 1901.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, even after twenty years in the new land, an important degree of social distance remained between the immigrant Mennonite household and Manitoba's wider society.

More threatening to Mennonite solidarity than familiarity with English, however, were the restraints they faced in establishing farm households in each generation. In this pursuit, the Ontarians clearly faced obstacles unfamiliar to the Manitobans. Census and tax records tell the story. By 1901, when 92 percent of Hanover Mennonite households still reported a livelihood from agriculture, only 77 percent of rural Waterloo Mennonite households did.<sup>36</sup>

This story is told even more specifically by patterns of marriage and birth, as recorded by the census takers. Mennonites, like many other European rural groups, usually allowed youth to consider marriage only when resources to establish an independent household were within sight.<sup>37</sup> In land-abundant Manitoba, households were clearly established by younger persons than in Ontario. The census records of 1901 do not record marriage dates, but they do indicate the number of unmarried adult children still living with their parents and, hence, hint at relative ages of marriage and household formation. The fact that twice as many (21 percent) Waterloo families had unmarried children, aged twenty-three or older, living at home than did Hanover families (11 percent) suggests different ages of marriage. This figure is especially significant in light of the fact that many fewer Manitoba teenaged children worked as life-cycle (unmarried youth) servants than did their Ontario counterparts. In 1901, for example, when 41 percent (156 of 379) of Waterloo Mennonite households employed unmarried youth, only 15 percent (53 of 350) of Hanover households had similar employees. These figures may reflect the more intensely cultivated Ontario farms, but they also indicate that at an age when many Ontario youth worked as servants, many Manitobans were already married.

Family size and birth rates also reflected the closing opportunities for establishing farm households in Ontario. Despite the Waterloo Mennonites' greater access to urban-based medical facilities and accompanying lower rates of infant mortality, their average family size in 1901 was only 5.3 persons, compared to 6.0 in Hanover.<sup>38</sup> The larger Hanover families, no doubt, reflected higher rates of fertility in Manitoba than in Ontario; Hanover women were relatively young when they bore their first children. Census



records indicate that the average Hanover mother's age at the birth of her first surviving child was 21.6 years, almost two years less than 23.5 years for the mothers of Waterloo. An even more striking statistic, revealing differing household strategies, was the percentage of households consisting of young childbearing couples. In Hanover, 41.8 percent of the households consisted of a couple in which the wife was thirty-five years or younger and a mother; conversely, only 23.5 percent of the Wilmot and Waterloo townships consisted of similarly defined young couples. Clearly, the Ontario youth, faced with greater restrictions in establishing separate households, married later, practiced greater fertility control, and more often left the community.

### **Farm Households and Ethnic Boundaries**

Despite the differences of opportunity in Waterloo and Hanover, there is evidence that Mennonites of both places actively pursued strategies to establish farm households for the rising generation and to maintain ethnic social boundaries. During the 1890s, both communities were successful in ensuring an agrarian existence for the majority of their members. Mennonites of both places found new sources of farmland, maintained old inheritance practices, sanctioned the accumulation of land by large families, and pursued a self-sufficient household mode of production.

In the search for new sources of land, the Manitobans had an easier time. Even after all the available fertile and arable homesteads in Hanover had been taken in the 1890s, farmers found new land sources within and just outside the settlement boundaries. One source of land was the 1700 acres in each township that had been reserved as Hudson's Bay Company land and school sections. Farmer Cornelius Plett's father had purchased 480 acres of this reserved land as early as 1883, but most of the land was acquired during the 1890s. Another source of land became available in the 1890s, when the "open field system" in Hanover unraveled and farmers began plowing the old village commons. In 1894, for example, Plett's neighbor, farmer Abram M. Friesen, left the village Blumenort and secured land for his children by cultivating his own individually registered "quarter-section" on what had once been the village pasture. Other farmers found land outside Hanover. Just to the north lay the vacant 240-acre land parcels reserved for Manitoba's Métis after the 1870 Red River uprising. Additionally, some farmers found land in the Northwest, just a day's travel by train to the west in present-day Saskatchewan and Alberta. By 1891 Reverend David Stoesz noted he was considering establishing "a new reserve

for Mennonites" in the Northwest. The ensuing migration west guaranteed that in Hanover, more than 90 percent of farmers cultivated their own land in 1901.

Ontario Mennonites found it more difficult to safeguard the agricultural nature of their community. Still, they were committed to its survival. Urbanization and chronic land shortages made for uneasy times during the 1890s. Deep church schisms occurred as Mennonites diverged in their schemes to secure a separate religious identity. On one extreme, the conservative Old Order Mennonites joined their Amish neighbors in emphasizing radical social nonconformity with outward symbols such as plain dress and resistance to motorized technologies. On the other end of the spectrum, progressive Mennonite families sent their children to college in what Chad Gaffield has identified as an Ontario-wide approach to "family reproduction" within "new social and economic structures."<sup>39</sup>

The majority of Waterloo families, however, saw the agrarian household as the bulwark of cultural continuity. The cost for land at thirty-seven dollars an acre in Waterloo was almost four times the ten dollars an acre that Manitobans were paying, yet the Ontario Mennonites did not waver in their search for a landed existence.<sup>40</sup> Well-to-do farmers simply borrowed money, leveraged their existing holdings, and purchased the high-priced developed land within Waterloo County. In 1900, for example, fifty-five-year-old farmer David Bergey borrowed almost \$7000 and purchased another 100-acre farm, thus doubling his total farm size and enabling two of the six Bergey children to own land of their own.

Poorer farmers continued to find new land sources in less developed areas outside the two originally settled townships of Waterloo and Wilmot. Waterloo County was not like neighboring Peel County, with, as David Gagan has documented, its "relentless movement of people in and out of the county at every stage of its development." Still, there was a greater emigration from Waterloo than some studies have suggested.<sup>41</sup> The land David Bergey was able to purchase in 1900, for example, had been made available when owner Menno Shantz joined a Mennonite community near Didsbury, in Canada's Northwest.<sup>42</sup> Other Ontario Mennonites joined farm communities in a dozen different American states, especially in Michigan.<sup>43</sup> The most important source of farmland, however, was in the less fertile soil belts in Waterloo's northern townships of Wellesley and Woolwich, and in the less developed areas in the neighboring counties of Oxford, Wellington, and Perth. Indeed, although the Mennonite population in the original Wilmot and Waterloo townships remained stagnant between 1881 and 1921, at just over 3000 persons, the Mennonite population in the two

new townships and the three new counties doubled from 2506 to 5136 persons.<sup>44</sup> Thus, although the number of Mennonites living in Waterloo towns had risen to 1200 by 1921, this represented only 16 percent of Waterloo's Mennonite population. Compared to the 71 percent of Waterloo Anglo-Canadian and German residents who lived in towns, Mennonites were still clearly a rural, farm-based people, able to find land for the rising generation.

The degree of out-migration, however, was not the only indication that Waterloo Mennonites shared the Hanover Mennonites' commitment to reproducing the farm household. Another was the link between land accumulation and the developmental cycle of the Mennonite family. James Henretta's observation that in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania it was the "lineal family ... not the unattached individual, that stood at the centre of economic ... existence" also mirrors the Canadian Mennonite experience.<sup>45</sup> The practice of accumulating land in order to boost the individual farmer's status, power, or living standard was rare in both Waterloo and Hanover. It is true that, as in most agrarian societies, there were gaps between the rich and the poor in both Mennonite communities, with the most affluent 10 percent of Mennonites possessing about a quarter of the community's total land area, 21 percent of the land in Hanover and 23 percent in Waterloo Township. At the other extreme, the poorest 10 percent of Mennonite landowners owned just over 2 percent of the total land area in Hanover and 1.5 percent in Waterloo.<sup>46</sup> What is significant about this wealth differentiation is its direct link to family size. In the central township of Waterloo, for example, the average family size for the wealthiest 10 percent of 229 farmers was 8.1 persons, considerably greater than average family size of 5.9. By an accident of historical figures, the families of the top 10 percent of 109 farm families in three, selected, Hanover village districts was also 8.1 people, while the average family had 5.8 members.<sup>47</sup>

Case studies of farm families indicate that land accumulation was part of a strategy to secure generational succession. The majority of farmers in both Hanover and Waterloo, for example, engaged in a cycle of land accumulation before the age of fifty and then, when children came of age, of land de-accumulation. In Manitoba, the farm of Cornelius Plett's neighbor, Abraham Penner, was representative. He cultivated thirty-five acres in 1883 when he was thirty-six and had six small children; in 1889, when he was forty-two, the land area had increased to fifty-five acres; and in 1898, when Penner was fifty-one and the number of children was twelve—including six unmarried sons, aged twelve to twenty-three—the acreage peaked at 170 cultivated acres. By 1906, when Penner reached age fifty-nine, the

farm had decreased to sixty acres; in the meantime, however, six married children had been assisted onto a land area totalling 315 acres.<sup>48</sup> Similar patterns appear in Waterloo. Here, fifty-five-year-old David Bergey increased his acreage to 200 acres during the same decade in which his father-in-law, Moses Bowman, succeeded in divesting the last of his 250-acre farm.<sup>49</sup> Such overarching concerns with generational succession ensured that a high percentage of young Mennonite families, even in Waterloo County, would be able to establish their farms during the 1890s.

Ontario farmers were also able to overcome regional obstacles to land ownership because of the implications of the bilateral partible inheritance system they shared with the Dutch Mennonites. The aim of both groups was to establish each of the children, sons as well as daughters, on land of their own.<sup>50</sup> In Hanover, the *Waisenverordnungen* that had been transplanted from New Russia stipulated an egalitarian inheritance.<sup>51</sup> In Waterloo, similar centuries-old practices had been introduced from Pennsylvania. One recent study of inheritance among Waterloo Mennonites noted that "when the estate was settled all children divided the proceeds 'share and share alike.'" <sup>52</sup> The 1853 will of David Brenneman was typical. It called upon his wife Barbara to "take care of my surviving children," and requested his executors to "pay his debts," and to divide "my property ... into two portions of which my surviving widow shall have one portion and my surviving children the other portion."<sup>53</sup> These children, too, had their portions kept in trust until they reached the age of majority. When the surviving spouse died, each of the children would again be eligible for a share of the inheritance. In his 1869 will, widower Jacob Gingerich of Wilmot, for example, ordered his executors to "divide my estate in equal portions amongst my children ... in love and peace."<sup>54</sup>

The consequence of this system in Ontario was similar to its consequence in Manitoba. In both places, a single household secured two avenues, through the husband's line or through the wife's, by which to accrue land. Matrilocality in both Manitoba and Ontario was evidence that men often relied on the inheritance of their wives to help establish an independent household. The bride's patrimony may have been the reason why farmer Cornelius Plett's eldest son, Heinrich, settled in the village of his wife, Elisabeth Reimer, in 1889. Not only was Elisabeth in line to receive a 325-ruble inheritance from Russia, but her father, Reverend Peter Reimer, was also one of the wealthiest men in her village.<sup>55</sup> This practice was especially frequent when men hailed from poorer households than their wives.<sup>56</sup>

In Ontario, the bilateral system had one consequence not seen in Manitoba. Unlike Hanover women, Waterloo women sometimes remained single,



but in their unwed state they also sometimes aided men in establishing farms. When David Bergey, for example, sought to raise the \$7300 required for the 100-acre land purchase in 1900, he turned to his spinster sister, Lydia, for \$1100, and to two other women for an additional \$4800, thus raising more than 80 percent of the required money from women.<sup>57</sup> Most often, however, women used their inheritance to help establish their own households. As in Manitoba, there were signs of this practice in matrilocal residence patterns. In 1882, for example, farmer Ephraim Cressman moved to Breslau, the home of his wife, Susannah Betzner. In the following years, at least two of Cressman's brothers, Allen and Isaiah, actually moved onto farms owned by their wives' parents.<sup>58</sup>

The link between matrilocality and female inheritance was evident in the life story of farmer Henry Bear. A family history notes that after Henry Bear married Leah Bowman, the daughter of well-to-do farmer Moses Bowman, in 1868, Henry "worked out, staying away a week at a time." Later, the Bears purchased a farm in neighboring Oxford County. However, only when Leah's father stepped in with financial assistance and the Bears moved to a farm near Leah's parents did the Bear household become soundly established, with Henry eventually becoming a community leader.<sup>59</sup>

Inheritance practices, like the willingness to migrate in search for land and the practice of linking land accumulation to family size, ensured that Mennonites in both Hanover and Waterloo would remain an agrarian people.

### **The Commitment to Agraria**

Both Hanover and Waterloo Mennonites, therefore, exhibited a common commitment to life on a family farm. The promise of the successfully reproduced farm household was the continuity of old social networks, with people sharing common values, assumptions, and self-identities. The self-sufficiency of the family farm brought all household members to identify closely with a single social unit; the rural nature of community guaranteed a degree of social distance from the wider society; and the pursuit of generational succession within a culture of partible inheritance provided a context in which kinship ties were allowed to take root.

On the surface, it may have appeared that the Ontario and Manitoba farms were structured differently. Waterloo farms were located in a region supporting a higher degree of agricultural commercialization than were Hanover farms. Indeed, regional agricultural censuses indicate that Waterloo County farmers' buildings were valued at three times those of farmers



in southeastern Manitoba, \$1684 to \$578, and land was worth twice the amount, \$3995 to \$2180 (only in the value of machinery were the Manitobans slightly ahead).<sup>60</sup> Also, the crops of Waterloo differed from those of Hanover. Agricultural historians have long documented the decline of wheat production in Ontario and its ascendancy in western Canada.<sup>61</sup> Mennonite farms of Waterloo and Hanover exhibited these differences. Indeed, while the average Mennonite farmer in Waterloo Township cultivated 16.4 acres of wheat in 1896, or only 16 percent of the total average crop, the average Hanover farmer dedicated 58 percent of the household's acreage to wheat in 1891.<sup>62</sup> Instead of growing wheat, Waterloo farmers produced peas, corn, and turnips, as well as specialty crops such as carrots and sugar beets, and orchards of apples and pears. Many of these products were used as animal feed, especially for swine and milch cows; both milk and pork were sold to local markets in Berlin or one of the neighboring towns.<sup>63</sup> Hanover farmers, on the other hand, concentrated on products demanded by markets in Winnipeg, Ontario, and overseas. Thus, in addition to marketing wheat and oats as cash crops, they sold milk to one of Hanover's half a dozen cheese factories.<sup>64</sup>

But, more significant than the differences of the Waterloo and Hanover crops was the fact that both communities were equally geared to both self-sufficiency and market participation. The farm household in both places was self-reliant in food, fuel, and labor.<sup>65</sup> Diary entries in both Waterloo and Hanover suggest a common commitment to food procurement. They speak of hog-butcherings, bees, large potato gardens, and butter churning in both places; they note the work of cutting logs and firewood in lush Waterloo woodlots or in the vast forest lying to the east of Hanover; they detail the process of tapping maple trees in Waterloo and picking wild fruit in Hanover.<sup>66</sup>

Farm diaries also record the Mennonite households' self-sufficiency in labor. Census records note that many more farms in Waterloo employed servants than did farms in Manitoba, reflecting both the availability of labor in the east and its intensive agriculture. Still, family members met the largest part of the Mennonite farms' labor requirement in both Hanover and Waterloo. Younger farmers like Wilmot Township's Aaron Bowman, aged twenty-nine in 1890, could not rely on the help of his small children; he could, however, count on assistance from his retired father, Reverend Moses Bowman, his teenaged brother, Ezra, and his older married brother, Moses Jr.<sup>67</sup> Middle-aged farmers like David Bergey, on the other hand, relied almost exclusively on the labor of the children. While Bergey undertook the more public duties of running the family farm, his sons undertook

the fieldwork. A typical entry was 5 September 1900, when Bergey noted that he was "in Dundee in P.M. ... [while] Gilbert sowed wheat ... Ezra plowed and Herbert harrowed."<sup>68</sup>

The family labor pool also brought men and women together in a common pursuit and in joint identification with the household. Both Waterloo and Hanover Mennonites subordinated the identity of both spouses to the domestic unit. When Ontario's Moses Bowman noted in February 1890 that "we and Noahs took dinner at Aarons," or when Manitoba's Cornelius Plett noted in April 1895 that "for dinner Bernard Doerksens [visited us] ... and after dinner Gerhard Doerksens also came," it was more than a sign of a pervading patriarchy. True, Aaron and Noah were the married sons of Moses Bowman, and Gerhard and Bernard were the sons-in-law of Cornelius Plett, but the names as used in this instance referred not so much to individuals as to specific households and separate economic units.<sup>69</sup> In both Ontario and Manitoba, men and women strove together to ensure the survival of the household economic unit. Diaries delineate a gender division of labor, with men working the fields and women in the farmyard. However, in those days before the full commercialization of the family farm, women's work as producers was considered crucial to the household's survival.<sup>70</sup>

Both Waterloo and Hanover women prepared eggs, cream, vegetables, and butter for the market as well as for household consumption. References by Manitoba's David Stoesz to "the cow stepp[ing] on [my wife's] foot while she was milking," or to "my wife ... finishing the digging of the potatoes," point to the work of a household producer.<sup>71</sup> Entries by Ontario's David Bergey, noting, "at mill to pick up sorghum chop for wife," or Louisa Bowman's entries in her husband's diary that "cows, Topsy and Tidy calved," indicate that women's work also brought with it managerial responsibilities.<sup>72</sup> The differences in the work patterns of Hanover and Waterloo women reflected only the respective markets in which they operated. David Bergey's reference to "wife and I went to Berlin ... with eggs and cheese," or Moses Bowman's note that "Mom to Dundee with ... 19 dozen eggs," indicate the proximity of the Ontario farms to market towns. In Manitoba, distant Winnipeg was visited only on a monthly or bimonthly basis.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, mixed farming brought together the entire household in a common pursuit, ensuring that little outside labor would be hired, or that relatively few children would be compelled to find work in the towns and cities.

Another result of the Ontario and Manitoba commitments to a rural existence was a deeply rooted communal orientation. The immigrant

community of Hanover, of course, was the epitome of a closely knit community, bound by lines of kin and congregation, and bolstered by ethnic homogeneity. The critical mass of the Mennonite population in Hanover ensured that village councils, school boards, the fire insurance agencies, the orphans' trust organizations, the church-run credit unions, and even the municipal council would strengthen a sense of ethnic community.<sup>74</sup> The spacious land mass of Hanover had even meant that the two main church groups, the Berghthaler and Kleine Gemeinde, could coalesce in separate townships. Hanover Mennonites did receive visitors from other Mennonite churches; in fact, in both 1890 and 1895, Jacob Y. Shantz, a leading Waterloo Mennonite, visited Hanover, on one occasion meeting with Cornelius Plett.<sup>75</sup> Most often, however, Hanover Mennonites pursued social ties within their own congregation and in their own township.<sup>76</sup> And most often, these interactions were the informal encounters of daily life. When piglets were purchased, bread was borrowed, oxen rented, children hired, labor exchanged, or credit extended, the community's social boundary was best articulated.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the pluralistic nature of Waterloo County, Mennonites here also cultivated a closely knit community and maintained social boundaries. The Mennonite community here may have lacked both critical mass and the opportunity to control all community-based institutions, yet, Waterloo Mennonites also secured a high degree of "institutional completeness." A fire insurance agency, known as the Mennonite Aid Union, was begun in 1866; an annual Bible conference to study the Bible began in 1889; an annual Sunday School conference was first held in 1890; protracted revival meetings became an institution in the 1880s; and a church-run "poor fund" was actively maintained throughout the 1890s.<sup>78</sup>

Just as in Hanover, however, the informal, everyday interactions of rural life in Waterloo safeguarded the Mennonite community. These informal networks shaped the community's social boundaries. Diaries indicate that Mennonite families were acutely aware of the life-cycle events of their Mennonite neighbors. Births, marriages, and deaths of fellow Mennonites were recorded regularly. Farmer Isadore Snyder's entry for 9 August 1892, stating that "Allan Eby and Simon Moyer killed by lightning under a tree, found dead, side by side, by their wives shortly after," was unusual only in its tragic dimension.<sup>79</sup> More common were entries such as Moses Bowman's for 12 January 1890, which stated: "I and Ezra to the funeral of Martin Snider's child."<sup>80</sup> But common, too, were references to interactions with fellow Mennonites in the normal course of daily life. Neighbors attended each other's sales, they exchanged goods by barter, they assisted each other

in the harvest or at barn raisings, they extended credit to each other, they hired the poor or landless of their congregations, they dropped in for tea or dinner at their neighbors' on any given day, or, if they happened on business in a neighboring district at nightfall, they would stay the night at a fellow Mennonite's.<sup>81</sup> David Bergey's diary maps the pervasiveness of these informal networks. His entry for 12 January 1900 told of a typical trip to Berlin: "Wife and I started from home at 8 a.m.... Stopped at my parents on the way.... At Lucinda Cressman's for dinner.... In p.m. went to Bishop Jonas Snyders', he not being at home we went to Menno S. Webers' for supper. Then to Martin H. Bowmans' for the night."<sup>82</sup>

The singularly most important social network outside the household, however, was the extended kinship network that tied different households together in one intricate social unit. The abundance of land in Hanover had, in fact, encouraged the Mennonite immigrants there to strengthen kinship networks that had been weakened in land-tight southern Russia. Many Hanover villages were dominated by a single extended family; Cornelius Plett's thirteen-farmstead village of Blumenhof, for example, contained eleven farmsteads that claimed Deacon Isaak Loewen as father or grandfather.<sup>83</sup> Even as a church minister, a community leader, Cornelius Plett used his diary to record daily social interactions with his kin group. Indeed, 64 percent of his 170 visits during the first six months of 1895 were with close relatives—children, parents, or siblings. On a typical Sunday, Plett and wife Helena visited the household of one of their siblings, dropped in to see Cornelius's parents, and then visited with one of their married children. During the week, Plett worked closely with his relatives. Within the period of one month in 1895, he drove to Steinbach to shoe a horse with brother Peter Plett, visited his elderly parents where his wife was helping with the wash, slaughtered an ox with his daughters and sons-in-law, helped his son Heinrich butcher two pigs, and visited his daughter Sara as she was "expecting a child."<sup>84</sup>

Waterloo County social networks also reflected the pervasiveness of kinship. Partible inheritance meant that siblings often settled in close proximity.<sup>85</sup> Ephraim Cressman, who settled near his wife's parents' place in Breslau, made frequent mention in his diary of visitors, including Dad Betzner, Cousin Snyder, Aunt Lydia, Cousin Eli Good, and Uncle Jake.<sup>86</sup> The land squeeze in Waterloo showed its effect on kin relationships. While nine of Cornelius Plett's eleven siblings lived within five miles of his farm, only two of David Bergey's seven siblings lived near his place. The consequence was that only 36 percent of Bergey's thirty-two visits during the first six months in 1900 were with close relations, a pattern also reflected in the



lives of middle-aged Ephraim Cressman and the elderly Moses Bowman, whose interactions with close kin during a similar period of time represented 41 percent and 39 percent, respectively, of their total social interactions.<sup>87</sup>

These figures, however, do not necessarily reflect a weakening sense of kinship. Family historians, for example, have documented how kinship structure can change to reflect the wider social milieu.<sup>88</sup> Ironically, land shortages in Waterloo strengthened at least one aspect of kinship: it resulted in a relatively high number of stem families. Census records indicate that not only did twice the number of households in Waterloo than in Hanover have children older than twenty-three living at home, but also, twice the number had elderly parents living with their children (12.6 percent compared to 6.8 percent), and five times the number had lodgers (7.2 percent compared to 1.4 percent).<sup>89</sup> Significantly, many more domestic units joined forces to farm in Waterloo than in Hanover. Tax records for Waterloo Township indicate that 37.6 percent of the total Mennonite land area was cultivated jointly by the households of parents and their married children. Similar records for the Blumenort/Blumenhof Township (7-6E) in Hanover indicate that only 14.8 percent of land area there was operated jointly by different households.<sup>90</sup> Clearly, even in times of land shortages, the rural household had the flexibility to allow kin to coalesce.

The lives of Cornelius Plett in Hanover Municipality and David Bergey in Waterloo County during the 1890s were different. Plett and Bergey represented different generations of immigrants, they hailed from two different Mennonite groups, and they spoke different German dialects. They also came from different regions. Plett's Manitoba was marked by an abundance of land and a wheat frontier, and Bergey's Ontario was characterized by urbanization, industrialization, and cultural pluralism. Thus, while the Manitoba Mennonites had a well-defined sense of social boundary, and recorded high rates of endogamy and linguistic retention, the Ontario Mennonites interacted almost daily with non-Mennonites, spoke more English, and more readily changed church allegiances. Still, a common adherence to the established Mennonite values of a separated, simple lifestyle, rooted in land, the farm household, and agrarian community, characterized the majority of Mennonites in both the Hanover and the Waterloo settlements. Both communities undertook strategies to ensure the survival of this kind of ethnic and religious community. There were some behavioral differences



that stemmed from the more intense shortage of land in Waterloo than in Hanover: the Waterloo youth waited longer before they married and formed their own households; Waterloo parents more actively sought new sources of land outside the original townships of settlement, and more often, too, they lived in multiple-family households. Despite these differences, both Waterloo and Hanover Mennonites were prepared to "reproduce the conditions" required in their respective regions to maintain a rural, sectarian way of life. Both were committed to the generational succession of the farm household, even when it entailed secondary migrations to new settlements, or the creation of stem families. Both, too, practiced a particular system of inheritance, sanctioned a certain type of wealth stratification, and cultivated social networks that would maximize their chances of reproducing the agrarian household and, hence, of maintaining their community's social boundaries.

A comparison of a single ethnic group in two regions of Canada underlines the importance that historians often place on the variable of regionalism. Such a comparison indicates just how diverse the experience of any one cultural group can be within a single country. Mennonites of the frontier prairie west and those of the urbanized east could not possibly share identical experiences, or even have possessed similar descriptive traits.

Still, an inter-regional comparison of Mennonites suggests that common social practices sometimes took root despite the different restraints and opportunities of particular Canadian regions. In such a circumstance, the writing of a pan-Canadian experience of one group can be more than "an intellectual construct"; it can reflect a common, lived "reality." For Mennonites, that reality lay within the self-sufficient household and the sectarian community. That the Mennonites of Waterloo and Hanover sometimes followed different strategies in maintaining their communities is evidence of the restraints and opportunities of their respective regions; that these strategies were geared to a similar end is evidence of shared cultural values. A comparative analysis of third-generation Waterloo residents and first-generation Hanover residents suggests the degree to which Mennonites venerated an agrarian world. Common behavioral patterns across regions and generations illuminate a set of values that were not often given public expression.



The family of Heinrich and Helena (Unruh) Richert of the village of Blumenfelt, in the Alexanderwohl district in Marion County, Kansas. Heinrich (1831-1895) was a prominent farmer and preacher; Helena has been described as a pleasant and literary woman. They were married in 1869, after Heinrich's first wife, Anna Schmidt, died (Mennonite Archives and Library, Newton, Kansas).



A threshing scene near Goessel, Kansas (Mennonite Library and Archives, Newton, Kansas).

## 5.

### **Neighbors: Mennonites and Other Rural Folks in the American Midwest<sup>1</sup>**

IMMIGRATION HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA TENDS to focus on one of two themes. The social and cultural nature of specific, local communities is one concern. A second is the relationship of the ethnic community to the host society, its government, economy, or selected traditions. A minority of works have sought to be overtly comparative, placing the history of specific groups alongside that of their neighbors. In undertaking these inter-ethnic studies, historians have revealed a “hidden” dimension of the immigrant worlds.<sup>2</sup> A comparative study of immigrant farmers may indicate that few groups had unique agricultural practices such as cultivation procedures or crop selection. But it may also show that the adaptation to new environments, the process of ethnicization, the conflict between centripetal and centrifugal social forces, and the contest between envisioned communitarian values and encroaching forces of individualism were common elements linking most agricultural communities on the frontier. In this process, there were no stark differences between members of sectarian or liturgical churches, German or Scandinavian language groups, Catholic or Protestant immigrant communities. Comparative analysis may even suggest that differences between Yankee and

European farmers, or European and Asian, should be considered less pronounced than often suggested. Recent work on the history of diasporas, for example, places all immigrant farm groups in a single category.<sup>3</sup> Within such a category, a plethora of ethnic and religious groups comprises a single experience, albeit pluralistic in nature.

How does one create a pluralistic history of rural immigration to North America? Certainly, it requires an answer to some of the following questions. What did it mean to be “ethnic” for these groups? What adjustments, either to the physical or social environment, were all farm immigrants required to make? How did transnational identities aid or impede integration in the new land? How did ethnicity shape domestic relations? How did ethnicity affect interactions between immigrant groups in local regions? How did the solidaristic farm family create strategies of dealing with the disintegrative forces of capitalism? What can be learned of the Mennonite immigrant story by placing it alongside the experience of other groups?

Mennonite immigrants sometimes have been studied comparatively. Two studies, one based in Kansas and the other in Manitoba, are examples. In his 1990 work, *Prevailing Over Time*, historical geographer D. Aidan McQuillan compared the adjustment to the Kansas plains of three groups: the Mennonite, Swedish, and French-Canadian immigrants. He observed that each of the three groups was challenged by Kansas’s physical environment, marked by periodical drought, volatile markets, and an austere and expansive landscape. Each group experienced an ethnogenesis—a localized culture—that brought elements of Old World understanding to bear on the American experience.<sup>4</sup> In a 1999 study, *A Sharing of Diversities*, twelve contributing historians and social scientists undertook a comparison of the experience of Mennonites, Ukrainians, and Jews, mostly in western Canada. The study examined commonalities and differences among these groups. Each of the three groups had roots in present-day Ukraine, and yet spoke a different language and embraced a distinctive religion in Canada. Each faced tragic upheavals in history—pogroms for the Jews, revolutionary chaos for the Mennonites, famine for the Ukrainians—and yet moments of inter-ethnic benevolence were rare. Each comprised a minority, and yet each sought recognition of its respective contribution to the host society.<sup>5</sup> Comparing these groups illuminates characteristics shared by all farm migrant groups and those that were uniquely Mennonite.

Still, such studies are rare. To situate Mennonites within a wider rural context and to place them alongside other rural cultural groups, this chapter examines four books, each written at the close of the twentieth century,

between 1995 and 1997. They are each about the rural experience in the American Midwest within the decades that straddle the turn of the twentieth century. More importantly, each seeks to understand the dynamic exchange between inherited immigrant cultures and the new social realities associated with modernization: the growth of capitalism, state intrusiveness, global markets, and farm technology. But each book sets different parameters for its subject. Brian Beltman's 1996 study is that of a single farmer, a Dutchman in the Missouri Valley in the years after 1892. Linda Schelbitzki Pickle's 1996 book examines a much wider community, German-speaking immigrant women in five midwestern states, and it defines the immigrant experience with reference to two variables—gender and the German language. Jon Gjerde's 1997 *Minds of the West* casts an even wider net: here, the public and domestic lives of immigrant farmers of communitarian continental Europe—the Dutch, German, and Scandinavian farmers—are juxtaposed to individualistic, mobility-minded Yankee farmers. Finally, Mary Neth's 1995 work, *Preserving the Family Farm*, provides a perspective in which all midwestern American farm families are placed in the same culture, a gendered economic and social unit that was forced to adapt to "agribusiness," a globalizing economy, and an increasingly intrusive state. By examining these farmers, the neighbors of the Mennonite settlers, it may be possible to discover the universal qualities of the rural immigrant life, fashioned by a transnational identity, rooted in patriarchal households, separated from the Anglo-American host society, and circumscribed by global capitalism.

Brian W. Beltman's *Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley: The Life and Letters of Ulbe Eringa, 1866-1950* is more than a study of immigration to the American Midwest. It is based on a single person, Frisian farmer Ulbe Eringa,<sup>6</sup> and for the better part of the book, Eringa himself speaks through memoir and letter, translated from the Dutch by one of his daughters. The narration and reproduced text follow Eringa throughout his life. This story begins with his birth in 1866 in a dairy-farming family in western Friesland, and continues through his formative Calvinist education and his pitiful teenaged years as an orphaned servant. In 1892, at the age of twenty-six, Eringa migrated to the United States. Initially, he joined the Dutch farm community of Sioux County, Iowa, but quickly advanced to better fortune in Bon Homme County, Dakota. Here, in 1899, he and his wife, Maaïke Rypstra, a fellow lower-class Frisian, became landowners as well as central players in a Frisian chain migration and a fledgling Dutch Reformed church. Over the next thirty years, the Eringas raised six children, increased their land holding to 640 acres, secured a college education for several of their



daughters, and passed the farm on to their only son, Pier. In 1926 the Eringas returned to Iowa to settle in Orange City, from which, in 1949, Ulbe wrote his last-known letter. He died a year later.

Eringa's is not the only voice the reader hears. Brian Beltman has skillfully placed the life of the book's subject within a dynamic, Dutch immigrant community. His argument echoes the ring of the "contemporary generation of scholars" who have discovered "that immigrant rural folk were less assimilated into the national mainstream than once thought."<sup>7</sup> Beltman goes far beyond documenting transplanted ethnic traits; there are no windmills, wooden shoes, and tulips in this story. Instead, Old and New World cultures interact in a complex and often contradictory way. American capitalism is triumphantly accepted, but deeply felt transoceanic kinship ties are cultivated, nevertheless. A heartfelt Dutch pietism permeates the home, but a full acceptance of the American missionary movement is its public expression. Linguistic assimilation and exogamy are acceptable, but, simultaneously, a strong sense of ethnic boundary is maintained. Secularization occurs among members of the third generation, but alongside this change is an embrace of symbolic ethnicity by Beltman, a grandson of Ulbe Eringa. A microanalysis of a single immigrant's life clearly identifies the social context of integration.

The act of narrowing the subject to a single person does invite the classic biographer's pitfall: the author's inordinate affection and empathy for his subject. In the process of portraying farmer Eringa's immigrant experience, Beltman seems to adopt the voice of the subject for himself. Eringa's letters in the book, for example, illustrate an immigrant who creates a sharply dichotomous world, one simultaneously heralding America's promise and denigrating The Netherlands' technologically primitive society, with its social differentiation and economic inertia. And this, too, seems to become the basis of Beltman's analysis. He speaks disparagingly of "ancient" and "long-established" landholding culture in Friesland, without considering the possibility it may have been Frisian partible inheritance that created the cultural practices—the high fertility, the commodification of land, and the enduring sense of recoverable status—that undergirded farm commercialization.<sup>8</sup> Beltman cites the 1921 Immigration Law for ending Frisian emigration, without considering Frank Thistlethwaite's argument that emigration from Europe had slowed of its own accord as Europe itself was buoyed by new economic opportunity.<sup>9</sup> Beltman sees the letters themselves as signs of "ethnic persistence," without considering that they may have been mechanisms of "ethnic invention," in which a

mental world pitted the Dutch-American against both homeland and host society.<sup>10</sup>

The ironic result of allowing the New World/Old World dichotomy to shape Beltman's analysis so strongly is that Eringa's immigrant voice is crystalized. But has it become too clear? Arguably, Eringa interpreted the Dutch past from the perspective of America. That interpretation was a critical component of adjustment, creating an implicit mythology that gave meaning to the huge financial, physical, and psychological strain of the act of relocation. To accent the benefits of the new land and to disparage the restrictions of the old country was, no doubt, a critical act in any immigrant's adjustment. *Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley* uses a single immigrant's experience to add this perspective to the scholarship of rural immigration history in the United States. It suggests that the task of every immigrant—Dutch Reformed or Dutch Mennonite—was to distance oneself from both the host society and the old homeland.

In her book *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest*, Linda Schelbitzki Pickle undertakes a comparative study of multiple, distinctive, German-speaking groups. As the title suggests, this book intertwines themes of gender, ethnicity, and rurality.<sup>11</sup> The result is a description of a rich and multilayered world of German-speaking immigrants. The language of discourse may be the same, for no matter the dialect spoken, the rich cache of letters and memoirs are in High German. Still, Schelbitzki Pickle, a professor of German and Foreign Languages, shows a remarkable sensitivity to German immigrant diversity over five midwestern states—Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska. There are Dreisziger Germans, Saxon Old Lutherans, Black Sea Catholics, Mennonites, and many other groups. There are religious and secular communist groups, liturgical and pietistic worshippers, individualistic and communitarian settlers, chain and group migrants, and High-German and Low-German speakers. A central strength of the book is its detailed and empathetic biographical reconstruction of dozens of believable "flesh and blood" German-language women. Their location in the hidden worlds of family and household, in the informal social networks of the ethnic community, and in the limited public roles as medical "Braeucher" and marriage "Fuersprecher" brings fresh detail to the study of immigrant women.

The book, however, is more than simple narrative. It pursues the controversial argument that German-speaking women were "contented among strangers." This contentedness was a mental state not rooted in equality. Indeed, the author is insistent that overarching the culturally diverse Germans

was a conservative, self-denying, patriarchal household that provided women with little opportunity in the public sphere and, as dozens of “proverbial sayings” indicate, dubious cultural status. However discriminatory this might be, argues the author, women found the arrangement to their advantage. Like the author’s own grandparents, the women of this book simultaneously experienced “the separation of [gendered] spheres” and an “essentially harmonious life together” with their husbands.<sup>12</sup> Alongside their husbands, women worked in “private worlds” where they possessed important direct and indirect economic roles, and made crucial “contributions” to frontier life. Then, too, because the domestic sphere was “shielded” from assimilative pressures and became the “core” of German self-identification, these women assumed central roles as the custodians of German ethnicity. They preserved the language, maintained German foodways, and told the stories of the “Pelznickel” and the gentle terror of the “Polterabend.” In the end, the conservative nature of both household and community—among all the German-speaking immigrant groups, including the Mennonites—prevented “cultural alienation,” the bane of frontier experience.

Schelbitzki Pickle’s thesis, however, does raise a debate. Was there an overarching German-American culture of gender? And did this persisting ethnic milieu present social benefits that ameliorated the injustice of gender inequality? Were women so pleased that “cultural conservatism in gender relations ... shielded women from many stresses” that they submitted to a pervading patriarchy?<sup>13</sup> The author seems out of step with the most recent women’s historiography that emphasizes gender construction and symbols of resistance. In defence of this intricately crafted book, however, it must be noted that “contented” refers as much to a foundational power that these women exercised in the community, as to some kind of quiet compliance to a domestic ideal. *Contented Among Strangers* describes women who possessed status as rigorously as it portrays women represented by the “quiet, man-subordinated little woman effac[ing] herself...”<sup>14</sup> Much of the book suggests that within the overtly patriarchal ethnic cultures, women still found cultural material with which to resist the harsher elements of patriarchy and to cultivate a female culture, supported by close-knit, female, social networks. Female contentedness, it seems, may have arisen not from acquiescence to patriarchy, but from hidden forms of resistance firmly entrenched in ethnic culture. The book also presents a wide spectrum of German culture, illustrating that women had a range of options with which to assert themselves. And, evidence in the book shows that German culture may not have been a primordial inheritance as much

as a dynamic, instrumental, and historically contingent identity, in which human agency had considerable latitude. Clearly, those societies were complex enough to afford all women some measure of autonomy. Such conclusions would certainly fit the Mennonite women's experience, situated as it was between patriarchal structures and specific cultural forms that abetted female agency.

The spectrum of shared immigrant cultures broadens with the third book. Jon Gjerde's *Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West* traces ethnic or cultural identities of settlers on the American frontier during the settlement and community-building phases.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the book charts the evolution to those identities. In the process, Gjerde bravely forgoes the convention of the past few decades and rejects the idea of cultural persistence or transplantation. Indeed, he suggests that a kind of "inexorable" assimilation occurred. But the route to assimilation follows no preordained sociological model: Frederick Jackson Turner, Robert Ezra Park, Milton Gordon, and other theorists of assimilation do not comprise the framework of analysis. Instead, Gjerde documents a path of assimilation that is multidirectional, filled with ironies and conflict, and capable of multilayered and often contradictory identities. He argues that the very conditions that enabled transplantation and ethnicization also undermined those phenomena. Ample land in America allowed immigrants to move above the closed economies that threatened households in Europe, but the land tracts in the New World nevertheless held the seeds of economic well-being, and were the avenue to participation in the global capitalism that proved disintegrating in its own way. The ideology of the American revolution and, hence, America's national identity—Enlightenment ideas, including religious toleration—permitted and even encouraged ethnic community leaders to voice publicly their conservative, communitarian concerns. If this undermined the power of local American leaders, it would be even costlier for the immigrant leaders, who were unwittingly drawn into American politics and who discovered their own people assuming democratic values. Gjerde concludes with the irony that as "ethnicized groups were encompassed under the canopy of a pluralist American society ... they used that entrance to become part of the political and social debate of the nation."<sup>16</sup>

The book imbues the concept of "assimilation" with new meaning. It also does the same with another well-worn model, the Yankee/ethnic European dichotomy. Few traditional American histories have been written without contrasting the host society or charter groups to the immigrant cultures and peasant economies of the continental Europeans. The Yankees,



rooted in the ideology of the American Revolution and the Second Great Awakening, had acquired liberal principles that encouraged mobility, individualism, and “gain” mentalities among farmers. The ethnic Europeans, usually Germans or Scandinavians, bypassed or reacted to the Enlightenment, and emphasized communitarian, corporatist and solidaristic values. This dichotomy—that is, the sharp break between village and society, community and individual—possesses all the features of classical theories of modernization. It even presents itself with a degree of intemperance. Old World traits may have “differed greatly from village to village, not to mention region to region,” but most immigrants shared such a basic commitment to conservative values, they could all fall under the category of “European ethnic group.”<sup>17</sup> The dichotomy is overarching, making such categories as Catholic or Lutheran, liturgical or pietistic, German or Scandinavian, count for much less than is usual in immigration histories. In the book, South German Catholics, fearing the effects of 1848 revolutionary themes in Germany, worked from the same script as did Mennonites fearing the military reforms in Czarist Russia. Both subscribed to ideas of “authority and hierarchy,” even though one group did it by shoring up isolationist, sectarian, social boundaries, and the other by entrenching ecclesiastical hierarchies.

The innovative approach Gjerde takes to the concepts of “Yankee” and “European” is especially noteworthy. He argues, first, that these identities pervaded immigrant cosmologies and world views. The social realities of the household, for example, were tied to the public cultural and political discourse. Groups that saw society in organic terms, as a communitarian whole ordered by natural law, also supported what William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaneicki called “familial solidarity.” Just as the wider community was ordered by unequal relationships, so, too, were households and families, shaped as they were by patriarchalism and paternalism. Gjerde provides a careful analysis of these “ethnic” marriage patterns, inheritance procedures, fertility rates, and household economies. Symbiotically, these practices create a plethora of localized cultures, each distinct from the other, but all even more distinguishable from Yankee ways.

A second aspect of the Yankee/European dichotomy is even more surprising. This is the constant, vigorous, and evolving debate between the two broadly defined groups. In this book, nativism was not simply xenophobia, but part of an evolving viewpoint of Americans, dismayed that the West, which symbolized the nation’s growth, had become a bastion of Old World cultures that threatened vulnerable Republicanism. In the book, conservative voices are not merely anti-intellectual,



but articulate, immigrant minds critiquing the social consequences of an advancing industrial and capitalist order. Both critiques evolved, becoming more articulate and publicly placed as the nineteenth century closed. Both were in a bitter struggle for supremacy. The West was the heart of these culture wars. But the conflict turned easily into a synergism of sorts; the two entities in conflict also informed and shaped each other. In the end, Gjerde argues, "immigrants and their leaders invented and continually modified both a sense of allegiance to an imagined community composed of Americans and a reified notion of a common pre-immigration past."<sup>18</sup>

The conflict in the heartland, therefore, was not between the specific ethnic groups—Danish Lutheran, German Catholic, or Dutch Mennonite—and Yankee society. Conflict pervaded the culture of an evolving Yankee community. It shaped the internal debates of ethnic communities and surprised the leaders who believed that complete transplantation was possible. In this respect, few European groups were unscathed. Still, each group tended to envision itself alone against America. But this was an imagined battle; the real battle was one shared by all "ethnics" and its success against Yankeeism bore the ironic price of integration into American society.

In a sense, Mary Neth's book, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940*, is narrower in scope than Gjerde's. In its subtitle it promises to focus on women.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the book is more broadly conceived than the three above. Its subject is the midwestern, American, farm family in the context of the relentless march of agribusiness supported by progressive governments. In this respect, ethnicity matters little and Neth makes relatively little of it. She does note the existence of ethnicity, but mostly in the way it pitted European descendants against African Americans and Hispanics.

Yet, her book's contributions to the study of immigrant cultures, including those of Mennonite communities, are numerous. It provides a wealth of information on changes in farm culture during the first half of the twentieth century, including technological, institutional, and economic innovation. It downgrades Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis and raises in its stead the socially disruptive spectre of industrialization and urbanization. A chapter that traces the evolution of the communitarian threshing culture, with the individualized and agribusiness-oriented combine harvest, is especially rich and insightful. New technologies, for example, are seen to have changed the logic of economic production. They altered social relations and had a domino effect on a host of other agricultural practices. Most significantly, the book peels back the image of a static, homogeneous American countryside, and explores the frequently

conflicting social categories of that society, including generation, gender, and class. Class lines run not only between tenants and owners, but also between farm operators and International Workers of the World (IWW) threshing gangs. And generation is more than a life-cycle difference; it is intertwined with the new lures of mass media and urban culture. The most detailed analysis is on gender and on internal household relations.

The central thesis of the book is controversial. It is no longer innovative to suggest the social relations within the farm, or women's roles on the farms, were crucial components in rural history. With other books by Sarah Deutsch, Jane H. Adams, Nancy Grey Osterud, Katherine Jellison, Deborah Fink, Joan Jensen, and others, Neth is probably wrong in asserting that rural history "pays little attention" to women's labor or gender analysis. And, given works by Kathleen Conzen, Jon Gjerde, Robert Ostergren, and others, neither is it innovative to suggest the family farm was the basis of the rural community. What makes Neth's book important is its argument that "in rural America, the development of industrial capitalism directly collided with a family based labour system."<sup>20</sup> Especially important was this development's impact on women who had once held meaningful economic roles in the household and crucial social functions in the farm community. Business and government interests joined forces to dismantle this system, once the underpinning of both rural and European immigrants and Yankee farmers.

The family farm, in Neth's analysis, is not an idealized and static social formation that preceded industrialization. It stands in opposition to advanced capitalism. It contests the imperatives of capitalism, which "depended" on the family farm's dissolution. The contest, however, was not between an outmoded economic unit and modern markets. Rather, it pitted a community-based, gender-interdependent economy against an insidious form of consumer-oriented, large-scale, government-supported agribusiness. Its only aim was an ever-increasing agricultural efficiency. To accomplish this, a direct, premeditated set of "agricultural policies asserted a new patriarchal structure" in order to "alter rural living."<sup>21</sup> A new sense of manhood espoused entrepreneurialism, and womanhood was separated from the farm and focused on consumerism. Neth argues the policies were deceitful because they were hidden in price supports, prescribed production levels, loan guarantees, and agricultural college curricula that purported to support all farmers.

In this story, farm people "resisted." But they did so without avail, because the "hegemony" and "power" of government and business eventually succeeded. Women, especially, suffered in this arrangement. Their status

depended more on a household economy than did the men's, who controlled the entrance to the marketplace. Women's work at "making do," ensuring subsistence, and producing "commodities" bolstered their status. Agribusiness promised to enhance male stature, especially that of the more well-to-do farmers. Women, too, played greater roles in forming the emotional bonds of community, through a culture of borrowing, gift exchange, and labor reciprocity, than did men, and this role was threatened by ideas of gender-separated, efficient agribusiness units. Moreover, "work flexibility, shared responsibilities and mutual interests" of household economies that had undercut the potential hazards of patriarchal structure now disappeared.<sup>22</sup>

In Neth's book, then, social change is given a different meaning from that in books by Beltman or Gjerde. The threat of assimilation does not come from some ubiquitous host society wishing to eradicate the cultural distinctions of the ethnic group. All farm, immigrant, or Yankee groups are asked to adapt to global capitalism and its handmaiden, the intrusive government. In this account, male farmers are passive recipients of the new gospel of efficiency and women its unwilling victims, duped into domestication by the Farm Bureau and its arm, the Home Domestic Units and advertisements that linked respectability with consumption. Nevertheless, Neth discovers a residual culture of resistance as capitalism "confronted farm people accustomed to distrust in the marketplace."<sup>23</sup> Many farm families avoided consumerism, "making do" with the bare essentials, and many others only selectively appropriated the new technologies. Such resistance is documented from a wide array of private and public sources: diaries, oral interviews, memoirs, census data, United States Department of Agriculture sociological studies, and newspapers. And Neth tells of the resistance of ordinary farm folk with the passion and imperative of a farm child. "Someone who grows up on a farm should write about rural America,"<sup>24</sup> writes Neth, displaying the roots of that plague, "agribusiness," and joining in the battle with the ordinary men and women of the early part of this century to preserve the family farm. Neth envisions a "new agriculture" in which the old social arrangement—mutuality and interdependence within the household and community—is recreated. In the end, Neth has created a dichotomy that places the concept of assimilation into a broad context. All farm families, and not only ethnic farmers such as the Mennonites, were cajoled into adaptation to a bigger culture. What may have appeared as Americanization to ethnic members may, in fact, have been an embourgeoisment perpetrated by the vested interests of global capitalism.

These works by Beltman, Schelbitzki Pickle, Gjerde, and Neth provide glimpses into an important aspect of the Mennonite immigrant worlds. These are the experiences of their neighbors. They suggest that many of the Mennonite encounters were, in fact, shared experiences. Mennonites may have possessed unique symbols and labels, but the process by which they brought an ethnicity—that is, a shared history and system of understanding—to bear on the frontier was not unique. The Dutchman Eringa quickly adopted a cosmology intersected by conceptions of the old and the new worlds, even though religious ideas brought from the Netherlands undergirded this new dichotomy. The German women—Catholic and Protestant—possessed a social latitude often hidden by the public face of ethnic patriarchy. The continental European immigrants consciously pitted their corporate, communitarian, organic views of rural society against the more mobile, individualistic, Yankee worlds. Rural immigrants as a whole saw their households challenged in the twentieth century by the interests of big business and governments seeking to advance the commercialization of agriculture.

Mennonite immigrants shared in each of these four worlds. They were deeply religious farmers of Dutch descent who, over time, had adopted modern agricultural practices after leaving The Netherlands. They were German-speaking immigrants whose household-based gender relations were determined by the imperative of farm life and couched in the patriarchal language of German. They were continental Europeans whose commitment to farm life and cohesive community challenged the Yankee paradigm. They were farm folks who faced the agenda of rapid integration into advanced capitalism. These worlds they shared with many other immigrants. They also saw the fashioning of new worlds as they encountered and interacted with these neighbors.

Knowing the worlds of their neighbors sheds light on the worlds of the Mennonites themselves. There were similarities, as religion, environment, capitalism, gender relations, and American Yankee culture shaped the lives of all immigrants. More importantly, perhaps, there were commonalities that arose from inter-ethnic interactions. The America the Mennonites saw was not only the America composed of federal congressmen weighing the requests of Mennonite immigrant leaders, or railroad tycoons negotiating land deals with Mennonite farmers. The Mennonites would also come to know a polyethnic America. When Mennonites underwent “Americanization,” it was not at all clear which part of a multifaceted America they came to know. Pietistic Dutch-American farmers, hardworking German-Catholic women, outspoken Scandinavian-American political writers, and

commercializing Yankee farmers were all there in the composite picture that Mennonites knew as the "outside world." Their religious teaching raised suspicion of the "world," even as it prescribed their roles as respectable immigrant farm folk.





## Conclusion

THE 18,000 MENNONITE IMMIGRANTS WHO ARRIVED FROM IMPERIAL Russia and settled in North America in the 1870s comprised about a third of the entire Russian Mennonite population. Given this critical mass, their sojourn in New Russia as a separate people, and their centuries-old Anabaptist teachings, the Mennonites were in a strong position to replicate their Old World societies. Indeed, they did this with such acumen, building their churches, schools, and visible communities, that they drew much attention from their contemporaries. Over the last 125 years, Mennonites have had an image of being transplanters *par excellence*. This book has suggested two things. First, the process of transplantation was often hidden from public view. Arguably, it was in the everyday worlds—in personal imaginations and mythologies, in gender relations, in household work activities, in parental preoccupation with generational succession—that the transplanted community had its cultural and social mooring. Second, the transplantation often succeeded because of the re-envisioning, reshaping, and reinventing that Mennonites undertook in their private, everyday lives. A perpetual dynamic adaptation engendered those informal worlds.

Ironically, this everyday adaptation often ensured the visible transplantation of communities that the public eye witnessed.

This book has focused on several aspects of this adaptation. The diarists who recorded the uprooting of Mennonites and the crossing of the expansive world between the Russian borders and North American shoreline revealed an ability to re-envision the stable and closed community they had known on the steppes north of the Black Sea. As they relocated to North America, they cultivated a keen imagination of community, one that was antithetical to the fleeting images of a harsh, urbanized, wider world, and biased to a view of a cohesive, God-sustained social network and God-guided conduit to the North American interior. As the Mennonites took root in Kansas, Nebraska, Manitoba, and other places, they built up their farms, not merely with an eye to reproducing a close-knit agricultural community, but with a deeply engrained strategy to ensure that their children would someday be able to farm. Centuries-old inheritance procedures and cultures, hidden from view by the establishment of community institutions, were carefully reproduced in the New World, often by adapting them to local succession laws. During their first generation of sojourn, a group of settlers, obscured in the domestic sphere, shaped the community. Women worked the households, cultivated relationships, and mentally reordered a community undergoing diaspora in ways that men, the keepers of public memory, often did not envision. Towards the end of the first generation, during the 1890s, it became apparent that one of the great preoccupations of the Mennonites, their love for land, the guarantor of the farm household and agrarian community, had sustained them. The working of this deeply rooted cultural value becomes apparent when one compares the social interactions of first-generation Dutch Mennonites and third-generation Swiss Mennonites, located in two distinctive regions of Canada. Finally, as Mennonites looked beyond their communities, they often saw an imposing host society, Anglo-American or Anglo-Canadian, as powerful and threatening. But a close look would also reveal another reality—fellow immigrants also lived in closed communities that were tested by a wider, integrating world.

This book has not been a general narrative of the Mennonite migration of the 1870s. That was not its intent. It selected several important activities that show how Mennonites ordered their lives during a period of upheaval and flux. Even those social and cultural nexuses are not exhaustive. This book has not specifically focused on children, folklore, money, piety, farm crops, environment, or on many other themes that intersected with the Mennonite immigrants' everyday lives. Each of these topics could easily

have sustained separate chapters of analysis. It is hoped, however, that the examples in this book have been sufficient to argue that behind the public face of the transplanted Mennonite community was a dynamic every day world in which the necessary reorientations and adaptations occurred to ensure the establishment of those immigrant settlements.

Nor has this book emphasized the differences between the American and Canadian immigrant communities. Such comparative history, of course, has great promise. However, by providing details of both communities, the Canadian and the American, this book has attempted to show the aspects of life that all immigrants shared: the upheaval of relocation, the gendered worlds, the imperative of household reproduction, and the need to adapt to global markets and intrusive governments. Certainly, there were national differences. Indeed, nationally conscious Mennonite historians in the 1960s and 1970s who drew a line between the two historical series, *Mennonites in Canada* and *Mennonite Experience in America*, revealed those differences. Governments and national cultures were affective: the Mennonites had railroad blocs in the US, government-issued blocs in Canada; a highly developed economy in the US, a more primitive one in Canada; political affiliations with French Catholics in Canada, with German Lutherans in the US; sweeping military exemption in Canada, limited state exemptions in the US. Moreover, the Mennonite settlers were welcomed to the voluntaristic, liberal nature of nationalism in the US, but barred from the more liturgically based Anglo-Canadian nationalism in the north. By accenting these differences, however, the strong parallels of experience may have been muffled. The fact is that households in both countries faced frontier situations in the 1870s and land shortages by 1900. Both places encountered government accommodations in the 1870s, but highly intrusive governments by World War I. More importantly, members of both communities adapted old understandings of gender relations, social boundaries, and household solidarity to new polyethnic, capitalist, and urbanizing societies.

Immigration historiography and social science theories illuminate both the Canadian and American Mennonite stories. Both stories reflected the thinking by recent students of ethnicity in North America that immigrant affinities are linked to intersecting identities of gender, class, region, nation, and linguistic group. Both possessed cultures not fully described by the overtly descriptive and public features of existence. These were the features Clifford Geertz has referred to as the "soft facts" of life; that is, those features that address the meaning of life, legitimize power, explain difficulties, and order flux.<sup>1</sup> Both suggest a process identified by Fredrik Barth, who has argued that as human societies face change, they draw on a rich repertoire

of culture, which they bring into a dialectical relationship with new circumstances. What may appear to be lost may nevertheless find its expression within the fabric of new customs. What may appear to be transplanted without change may, in fact, have been recast and re-established on new foundations.<sup>2</sup>

These approaches are the tools that can portray the nature of the everyday society of Mennonite migrants. This book's concern, therefore, has not been to identify unique Mennonite features as much as it has been to identify the social and cultural arrangements that allowed Mennonites to evolve as an ethnoreligious group. Clearly, it was important that Mennonites were descendants of the Anabaptists who practiced a Christian discipleship that emphasized an "evangelical faith, Christian love, godly manner of life, and observance of the 'true ordinances of Christ.'"<sup>3</sup> It was also important that they were Dutch-North Germans who spoke a West Prussian Low German and were inclined to specific architectural forms, foodways, and folklore. And, it was important that over time they had come to venerate close-knit agrarian communities. Together, these religious and temporal worlds provided the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s with a clear ethnic identity, a sense of "peoplehood."

As important as these expressions of ethnicity was the process by which they took hold in a new world. That process included communitarian imagining, household reproductions, and gender relations. On the surface, the migration of the 1870s seemed an almost static affair. An examination of the everyday life exhibits a hidden world of dynamic social relationships and cultural understandings. This world was not separate from the public side of the Mennonite communities; it was its undergirding.



# Endnotes

## Introduction

1. C. Henry Smith, *The Coming of the Russian Mennonites* (Berne, IN: Mennonite Book Concern, 1927); E.K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1955); Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); Theron F. Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation: Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988); John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, 1960 (Steinbach, MB: Hanover/Steinbach Historical Society, 2000).
2. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*; Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation*; T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); James Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989).
3. Jon Gjerde, "New Growth on Old Vines: The State of the Field: The Social History of Immigration to and Ethnicity in the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 18 (1999): 40-66.
4. Kathleen Neils Conzen, David A. Gerber, Ewa Morawska, George E. Pozzetta, and Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Invention of Ethnicity: A Perspective from the USA," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29 (1992).
5. John D. Thiesen, *Mennonite and Nazi?: Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1999); Fred Kniss, *Disquiet in the Land: Cultural Conflict in American Mennonite Communities* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).
6. Conzen, et al., "Invention of Ethnicity."
7. Dirk Hoerder, *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1999), 157.
8. For a discussion of this metaphor see Gjerde, "New Growth on Old Vines." The idea of "grafting" is perhaps an especially appropriate model for Mennonites who, over the course of five centuries of migration—from The Netherlands to Poland between

1540 and 1579, then on to Russia between 1788 and 1812, to North America in successive waves in the 1870s, the 1920s, and 1940s, with further migrations from Canada to Latin America in the 1920s and 1940s, and from Russia and Kazakhstan to Germany in the 1990s—have borrowed a rich variety of cultural ways. Then, too, one of the Mennonites' most venerated biblical passages is also the text on the teaching of the "true vine" from the 15th chapter in the Gospel of John.

9. Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Bahinese Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 5.
10. *Ibid.*, 6.
11. Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 326.

## Chapter 1

1. See, for example, Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), and Clarence Hiebert, ed., *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need: A Scrapbook About Mennonite Immigrants from Russia, 1870-1885* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1974).
2. For the examples, see Frances Swyripa, *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Dirk Hoerder, *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press 1999); Solveig Zempel, *In Their Own Words: Letters from Norwegian Immigrants* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Walter Kamphoefner, et al., eds., *News from the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home*, trans. Susan Carter Vogel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Many of the ideas of this chapter are also suggested in Royden Loewen, ed., *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863-1929* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1998).
3. Mario Maffi, *Gateway to the Promised Land: Ethnic Cultures in New York's Lower East Side* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 187.
4. Tamara Palmer, "Ethnic Response to the Canadian Prairies, 1900-1950: A Literary Perspective on the Perceptions of Physical and Social Environment," *Prairie Forum* 12 (1987): 59.
5. William Hanks, "Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice," *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987): 668-692, 19. For arguments that literacy in general creates this perception, see Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 42. For a critique of this reasoning, see Matthew Innes, "Memory, Orality and Literacy in an Early Medieval Society," *Past and Present* 77 (1998): 3-36.
6. Abraham Reimer, "Tagebuch," 1870-1874, 1879-1889," trans. Ben Heppner, Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives [hereafter EMCA], Steinbach, MB, Boxes 10 and 14.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*

9. David Stoesz, diary 1872-1896, trans. Henry Stoesz, *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve*, ed. John Dyck (Steinbach, MB: Hanover/Steinbach Historical Society, 1994), 410-455.
10. A.J. Dyck and Gustav R. Gaeddert, "Dietrich Gaeddert," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, ed. Harold S. Bender, Cornelius Krahn, and C. Henry Smith (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1995), 430.
11. Dietrich Gaeddert, diary 1871-1874, trans. n.n., Mennonite Library and Archives [hereafter MLA], Newton, Kansas.
12. Reimer, "Tagebuch"; Gaeddert, *ibid.*
13. For examples, see Cornelius Loewen, "Tagebuch," Mennonite Heritage Village [hereafter MHV], Steinbach, Manitoba; and Abraham R. Friesen, "Tagebuch, 1870-1873, 1876-1884," EMCA, Boxes 4 and 29.
14. Reimer, "Tagebuch."
15. Peter Fast, diary 1831-1910, trans. John Wohlgenuth, Delbert Plett, Steinbach, MB.
16. Dietrich Friesen, "Tagebuch," EMCA.
17. Reimer, "Tagebuch."
18. Abraham Friesen, "Tagebuch."
19. Gaeddert, diary.
20. Stoesz, diary.
21. Abraham Friesen, "Tagebuch."
22. Dietrich Friesen, "Tagebuch."
23. Reimer, "Tagebuch."
24. Gaeddert, diary.
25. Reimer, "Tagebuch."
26. Reimer, *ibid.*
27. Elias Eby, diary, trans. unknown, Mennonite Archives of Ontario [hereafter MAO], Waterloo, Ontario. For published portions of the diary and a biography of Eby, see Loewen, ed., *From the Inside Out*, 123-133.
28. Ezra Burkholder, diary, trans. Ethel May Burkholder Dvorak and Reginald Good, MAO. For the family history of Ezra Burkholder, see Ezra Eby, *A Biographical History of Early Settlers and Their Descendants in Waterloo Township 1895* (Waterloo, ON: Eldon D. Weber, 1971). For fuller reproductions of this diary, see Loewen, ed., *From the Inside Out*, 29-40.
29. Gerhard D. Doerksen, "Die Auswanderungs Reise von Russland nach Amerika im Jahre 1875," EMCA.
30. Heinrich A. Schmidt, "From Russia to America, 1874," trans. Esther H. Borgen, MLA. The place names have been given as recorded in the diaries. Given the changes in national borders and place names during the two world wars, and the lack of familiarity the travelers had with the places they cited, it is often difficult to verify the correct spelling of the places through which the Mennonites traveled. See, for example, Paul Robert Magocsi, *Historical Atlas of Central Europe* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

31. David Ediger, "Note Book by David Ediger, Nikolaidorf, South Russia," trans. Solomon L. Loewen, MLA; Cornelius Duerksen, diary, trans. Anna Dueksen Marterio-Neumann, MLA.
32. "Hamm Family Journals," Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives [hereafter MHC], Winnipeg, Manitoba.
33. Jacob Wiens, *Grandfather Wiens' Diary en route [from] Russia to Canada*, trans. unknown, Winnipeg, MB, n.d., MHC. For a full account by Delbert Plett of this remarkable man, see the magazine/journal of the Hanover/Steinbach Historical Society, *Preservings* 17 (December 2000): 20-44.
34. Delbert Plett, "Jakob B. Koop (1858-1937): Twin Creek Pioneer," *Preservings* 11 (1997): 43-46. Translated copies of the diary are published in Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition, 1874-1982* (Blumenort, Manitoba: Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983), 29-31; and in Delbert Plett, *Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, 1850-1975* (Steinbach, Manitoba: DFP Publications, 1986), 330-332.
35. Stoesz, diary.
36. Abraham Friesen, "Tagebuch." The diary refers to a similar display in October 1870. His note for that night included the following: "on two nights there were very bright northern lights, which were so bright that the sky was red as far as one could see; in the north it looked as though it was dawn. Streamers came from different directions and joined with one another above us, but not from the south." For yet another description of this event and a similar comparison to October 1870, see Gaeddert, "Tagebuch," who concludes that "God knows what it signifies." It is noteworthy that Jacob Epp, located about 100 miles northwest of Molotschna, makes no reference to this event even though his record covers January 23, 1872. See Harvey Dyck, ed. and trans., *A Mennonite in Russia: The Diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
37. Abraham Hiebert, diary, trans. Rufus Abraham Hiebert, MLA.
38. Peter Wiebe, *Zur Neuen Heimat* (Hillsboro, Kansas, 1924), MLA.
39. Coincidentally, these are also the first Mennonite women's diaries in Russia that were available for this study. For a diary of a Mennonite woman in Borosenko, Russia, see Helena Loewen Dueck Reimer, "Tagebuch," 1871-1873, Henry Fast, Steinbach, MB.
40. Marie Becker, "Our Trip from Russia to America, 1877," trans. Augusta Schmidt, *Alexanderwohl-Tabor: From Holland to America*, ed. Martha Friesen Gaber (self-published, North Newton, KS, 1961), 19-37. It seems that Marie was related to Wilhelm Lange, the influential Prussian Mennonite elder who had converted from Lutheranism and who in 1834 led a migration of forty families to New Russia to found the progressive and pietistic village and congregation of Gnadenfeld on Molotschna Colony.
41. Margaretha Jansen, diary, trans. Anna Linscheid, MLA, Cornelius Jansen Collection; Anna Jansen, diary, trans. Anna Linscheid, MLA. For a reproduction of Margaretha's diary for 1874, see Loewen, ed., *From the Inside Out*, 41-69.
42. For a history of the Jansen family, see Gustav Reimer and G.R. Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar: Cornelius Jansen and the Great Mennonite Migration, 1874* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office, 1956).

43. See Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Hans Medick, "'Missionaries in a Rowboat'? Ethnological Ways of Knowing as a Challenge to Social History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29 (1987): 76-98; Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Balinese Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

## Chapter 2

1. This is a revision of an article previously published in Spanish as "Si son herederas de la gracia, más aún de los bienes temporales: El sistema de herencia igualitario entre los Menonitas de Canadá," trans. Maria Bjerg, in *Reproducción Social y Sistemas de Herencia en una Perspectiva Comparada Europa y los Países Nuevos*, ed. Blanca Zeberio, Maria Bjerg, Hernán Otero, and Orieta Zeberio (Paris: L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1998), 145-170.
2. *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 May 1874, quoted in Clarence Hiebert, ed., *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need: A Scrapbook About Mennonite Immigrants from Russia, 1870-1885* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1974).
3. D. Aidan McQuillan, *Prevailing Over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875-1925* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 24; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 267.
4. In a remarkable 1902 argument to the Manitoba Surrogate Court, Mennonite elders even contended to Anglo-Canadian judges for egalitarian inheritance with the logic that if men and women are "joint heirs of the grace of life, how much more of the temporal goods." *Surrogate Court Rules for the Mennonites in the Province of Manitoba, Canada*, n.p., 1902, MHC.
5. Quoted in Jake Peters, *The Waisenamt: A History of Mennonite Inheritance Custom* (Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Village Museum, 1985), 7. Delbert Plett, *Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia, 1812-1875* (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1999), 187, relates a similar and possibly the same incident as occurring in the 1820s.
6. H.J. Habakkuk, "Family Structure and Economic Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Journal of Economic History* 15 (1955): 1-12; George C. Homans, "The Frisians in East Anglia," *The Economic History Review* 10 (1958): 189-206.
7. Habakkuk, "Family Structure," 7, 10, 13.
8. Homans also argued that Frisians did not practice the open-field system and venerated joint family landownership; this does not seem to hold true for Mennonite circles. Another observation that women inherited land, apparent in the fact that "tenements were often held by men bearing family names different from that of the first holder" (p. 191), does reflect Mennonite experience.
9. "West Prussia," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. IV, 923.
10. See Harvey Plett, "Georg Hansen and the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church: A Study in Continuity," Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 1991.
11. David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies in New Russia: A Study of their Settlement and Economic Development from 1789 to 1914," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1933, 110. See also James Urry, *None But Saints: The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion, 1989).



12. Rempel, "The Mennonite Colonies," 111. Neighbors were not allowed to purchase the farm unless they intended to use it to establish one of their own children or relatives on it as an independent household.
13. "Teilungsverordnung der an der Molotschna im Taurischen Gouvernement angesiedelten Mennoniten, 1857," MHC. I thank James Urry, Wellington, New Zealand, for bringing this document to my attention.
14. "Waisenverordnung von Russland, 1810," trans. Ben Hoepfner, MHV. I thank John Dyck, Winnipeg, Manitoba, for bringing this document to my attention.
15. The scenarios were numerous: "how to deal with children from more than one marriage?"; what to do "if the partner in the second or third marriage dies without descendants?"; "what to do when both parents die one after the other?"; "what to do when two die one after the other without leaving any physical heirs?"; "what to do when there are no physical heirs?" The answer to each of these questions was contained in a separate article, outlining in detail how grandparents and grandchildren differed, when uncles and aunts could expect an inheritance, and where stepchildren fit into the picture.
16. Liam Kennedy, "Farm Succession in Modern Ireland: Elements of a Theory of Inheritance," *Economic History Review* 44 (1991): 498.
17. Martine Segalen, "'Avoir sa part': Sibling Relations in Partible Inheritance Brittany," in *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship*, ed. Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 129-144.
18. Ernestine Friedl, "The Position of Women: Appearance and Reality," *Anthropological Quarterly* 40 (1967): 97-108.
19. For more details on this observation, see Royden Loewen, "'The Children, the Cows, My Dear Man and My Sister': The Transplanted Lives of Mennonite Farm Women, 1874-1900," *Canadian Historical Review* 73 (1992): 344-373.
20. If the guardians determined the child would not be able to make a living, then the child was to receive one third of the estate and then his or her share of the remaining part.
21. See Friesen, *Canadian Prairies*, 129-194; Robert V. Hine, *The American West: An Interpretive History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 9-45.
22. John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, 1960 (Steinbach, MB: Hanover/Steinbach Historical Society, 2000); Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*. Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 145-149, 204-207.
23. E.K. Francis, *In Search for Utopia: The Mennonites in Manitoba* (Altona, MB: D.W. Friesen and Sons, 1955), 45. See also Peters, *The Waisenamt*; and Hilda Anne Hildebrand, "Mennonite Mutual Aid and the Concept of Social Welfare: A Case Study of the Berghthaler Waisenamt and the Co-operative Movement in the Rhineland Municipality, 1874-1945," M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1989.
24. See Jeffrey Longhofer, "Toward a Political Economy of Inheritance: Community and Household Among the Mennonites," *Theory and Society*, 22 (1993), 337-362. It should be noted, however, that although Longhofer argues that Kansas Mennonites held to "no precept articulating inheritance rules," their own evidence indicates a preoccupation with "fair[ness] to all of the kids" and a proclivity to "radically

- subdivide their land." His conclusion that Mennonites in Kansas "were in effect asserting, for the first time in history, their right to devolve property without ... demand [from] the state or community" (p. 353) would seem to be open to debate. The article has shown neither that the Russian-based Mennonite inheritance bylaws were not practiced, nor that the fragmentation of land was a sign of individualism.
25. Margaret E. McCallum, "Prairie Women and the Struggle for a Dower Law, 1905-1920," *Prairie Forum* 18 (Spring, 1993): 19-34. See also Catherine Cavanaugh, "The Limitations of the Pioneering Partnership: The Alberta Campaign for Homestead Dower, 1901-25," *Canadian Historical Review* 74 (1993): 198-225.
26. *Province of Manitoba Statutes*, 1918, Chapter 26, "An Act Respecting the Dower of Married Women," Sections 12 and 13.
27. *Teilungs-Vereinbarung der von der Molotschna aus Russland Eingewanderten Mennoniten-Gemeinde in Manitoba* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1933), EMCA. The preamble notes that this is a reprint of an 1890 version. The Russian bylaws noted that the estate could not be sold by auction without letting the *Waisenamt* know; the Canadian bylaw merely cautioned the administrators to be "careful" with the assets of the minors. Another set of documents that could be compared are the following: *Teilungsverordnung und Waisenregeln, Schoenwiese [Ostliche reserve]*, n.p., 1877; MHV, *Mennonitische Waisenverordnung in der Provinz, Manitoba, Canada*, Winkler, MB: Volkzeitung Publishing House, 1903, MHV; *Allgemeine Waisenverordnung der Gemeinde Chortitz Ostliche Reserve, Manitoba*, Winnipeg: Rundschau Publishing House, 1930, MHV.
28. Interview with Professor Alvin Esau, Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, May 1997.
29. *Surrogate Court Rules for the Mennonites*.
30. Longhofer, "Toward a Political Economy," 351.
31. *Ibid.*, 354.
32. McQuillan, *Prevailing Over Time*, 134.
33. For a fuller analysis of the development in Cub Creek, see Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*, 125ff.
34. Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 138.
35. Land Plat of Cub Creek, 3-3E, 1900, Jefferson County Courthouse [hereafter JCCH], Fairbury, NE.
36. Numerical Index, Lands, Jefferson County, 1870-ca1930, JCCH.
37. Henry L. Fast, "The Kleine Gemeinde in the United States of America," in *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde, 1874*, ed. Delbert F. Plett (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1987), 102, 107, 110.
38. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 20 July 1904; Land Plat, 1900, JCCH; Numerical Index, 1870-ca1920, Cub Creek Precinct, JCCH; Population Census, Cub Creek Precinct, 1880 and 1900, Nebraska State Historical Library [hereafter NSHL], Lincoln, NE; Elizabeth Classen Rempel, *Genealogy of the Descendants of Jacob Klassen, 1792* (North Newton, KS, 1971).

39. Cornelius and Maria Friesen to Johann Janzen, March 16, 1896, Jolian K. Loewen Papers [hereafter JKL], Margaret Unger Loewen, Giroux, Manitoba. Ironically, Jakob, the eldest of the Klassen sons, received his wherewithal to begin farming in 1881, shortly after marrying Maria Thiessen, the daughter of one of the wealthiest men in Cub Creek. In a letter in 1881, Jakob Klassen Sr. noted that his son was "living with [his wife's] parents" and that the young couple was planning to establish their own farm shortly as they were anticipating receiving "part of the acreage [from her parents] this summer." JKL, Johann Klassen to Johann Janzen, 29 Dec. 1881.
40. For one account of this, see Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*, 195-217.
41. Cornelius Cicero Janzen, "Americanization of the Russian Mennonites in Central Kansas," MA thesis, University of Kansas, 1914, 105.
42. Ibid., 107.
43. Peters, *Waisenamt*, 19. The 1913 document noted further that "it will be assumed that those fathers who do not sign our "Waisenamt" Rules, desire that ... their estate be settled according to the law of the land." This is similar wording to the *Allgemeine Waisenamt der Gemeinde Chortitz* of 1930.
44. Interview with John Dyck, Hanover/Steinbach Historical Society, Steinbach, Manitoba, June 1997.
45. *Teilungs-Verordnung der von der Molotschna aus Russland Eingewanderten Mennoniten-Gemeinde in Manitoba* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1941), EMCA.
46. Ibid.
47. See Peters, *Waisenamt*, 17.
48. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, April 11, 1906.
49. "Index of Probated Wills, St. Boniface Judicial District, 1936-1962," Provincial Archives of Manitoba [hereafter PAM], Winnipeg, Manitoba.
50. The arrival of 20,000 Mennonites from Russia in the 1920s did not seem to affect the tradition of keeping wills as did the integrative times of World War II and the economic boom of the 1950s; indeed, the number of wills probated in the fourteen years between 1908 and 1922 was about ninety-seven, similar in number to the eighty wills probated over the course of the next fourteen years.
51. All wills quoted were located within Books B8, B9, B10, B13, B14, B15, containing the probate court orders. These orders are housed at the St. Boniface Probate Court [hereafter SBPC], St. Boniface, Manitoba.
52. "Last Will and Testament of Cornelius J. Classen," Meade County Courthouse [hereafter MCCH], Meade City, Kansas.
53. Book B8, Folio 430, SBPC.
54. Legislative Papers, Prairie Agricultural Census, 1946 and 1976, Legislative Library [hereafter LL], Winnipeg, Manitoba.
55. Tax Rolls, 1920; 1950; 1974, Rural Municipality of Hanover [hereafter RMH], Steinbach, Manitoba.
56. See family genealogies of extended Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite families at EMCA and Steinbach Bible College, Steinbach, Manitoba.

57. Despite having a son-in-law, there was no provision for him or his wife except permission granted to "use said machinery herein." See Book 8, Folio 519, SBPC.
58. Book 8, Folio 43, SBPC.
59. Book 8, Folio 6, SBPC.
60. Book 9, Folio 1165, SBPC.
61. Book 8, Folio 67, SBPC.
62. Book 8, Folio 87, SBPC.
63. Mark Friedberger, "The Farm Family and the Inheritance Process: Evidence from the Corn Belt, 1870-1950," *Agricultural History* 57 (1983): 1.
64. Sonya Salamon, *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming and Community in the Midwest* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); McQuillan, *Prevailing Over Time*; Kathleen Neils Conzen, "Peasant Pioneers: Generational Succession Among German Farmers in Frontier Minnesota," in *The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation*, ed. S. Hahn and J. Prude (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 259-292.

### Chapter 3

1. *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 1 April 1881, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, [hereafter CMBS], Winnipeg.
2. Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 202.
3. James Urry, "Gender, Generation and Social Identity in Russian Mennonite Society," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 17 (1999): 95-106.
4. Kristi Anne Stolen, *The Decency of Inequality: Gender, Power and Social Change on the Argentine Prairie* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1996).
5. Clarence Hiebert, ed., *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need: A Scrapbook About Mennonite Immigrants from Russia, 1870-1885* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1974).
6. *Ibid.*, 65, 241, 254, 402.
7. *Ibid.*, 180-1.
8. *Ibid.*, 300.
9. *Ibid.*, 247.
10. *Ibid.*, 228.
11. *Ibid.*, 226-227.
12. *Ibid.*, 454.
13. *Ibid.*, 253.
14. *Ibid.*, 383.
15. *Ibid.*, 300.
16. *Ibid.*, 369.
17. *Ibid.*, 402.
18. *Ibid.*, 384.

19. Ibid., 253.
20. Ibid., 239.
21. *Memmonitische Rundschau* 1 Feb. 1883; 1 May; 1 June; 15 Aug.; 1 Sept.; 1 Dec.
22. Ibid.
23. Hiebert, *Brothers in Deed*, 212.
24. *Nebraska Ansiedler*, Nov. 1878, CMBS.
25. *Memmonitische Rundschau*, 1 April 1882.
26. Ibid., 5 June 1880; 1 April 1883; 4 Feb. 1885; 1 July 1885; 11 Feb. 1885; 2 Dec. 1885; 16 Jan. 1886.
27. Hiebert, *Brothers in Deed*, 319.
28. Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 144.
29. *Memmonitische Rundschau*, 15 Dec., 1881.
30. Ibid., 15 April 1885.
31. Ibid., 24 Feb. 1886; 12 Feb. 1887.
32. Ibid., 4 July 1888; 9 Jan. 1889.
33. Ibid., 16 Jan. 1889.
34. Ibid., 23 March 1898; 6 April 1898.
35. Ibid., 7 June 1889; 2 John 9, *Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978).
36. *Memmonitische Rundschau*, 2 Nov. 1904.
37. Ibid., 8 March 1905; Proverbs 12:10, *Holy Bible*, op.cit.
38. *Memmonitische Rundschau*, 8 Jan. 1896.
39. Ibid., 10 May 1893.
40. Ibid., 12 March 1890.
41. Ibid., 4 May 1898.
42. Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: UCL Press, 1997).
43. *Memmonitische Rundschau*, 26 June 1901.
44. Ibid., 4 March 1902. The Aganetha Schmidt who wrote in June 1901 cited her address as Goessel, Kansas, and the author of the March 1902 letter gave her address as Moundridge, Kansas.
45. When subjects of the secondary diaspora reconnected, an especially strong display of emotion often occurred. When Aganetha's brother, Jacob, finally did write respond, "the first in 17 years of being apart," and described the death of six of his children, Aganetha could not contain her emotions. "Dear brother, it was with tears that I read your letter," she declared to the entire readership of the *Memmonitische Rundschau* in a letter in 1903. Ibid., 29 April 1903.
46. Ibid., Jan. 1902.
47. Ibid., 16 July 1902. Boldt gave his address as Gorotschinskaja, Samara.
48. Ibid., 15 Feb. 1882. In this issue, "Widow Helena Hamm" initiated such correspondence by sending greetings and asking about people in Russia.



49. Ibid., 29 June 1898.
50. Ibid., 26 Dec. 1900.
51. Ibid., 16 Jan. 1901.
52. Aganetha Schmidt of Goessel, Kansas, stated that the occasion of her 1901 letter was simply "because I hear so little of my siblings in Russia." See Ibid., 26 June 1901.
53. Ibid., 26 April 1905.
54. Ibid., 16 May 1900.
55. Ibid., 19 Jan. 1903.
56. Ibid., 17 Jan. 1900. Less typical in its reference to her husband, but bearing the overriding linkage to the maternal lineage, is the following statement: "I am Mrs. Abram H. Schulz, born Elisabeth Unruh, daughter of Cornelius Unruh, formerly resident in Gnadenheim, Russia." The letter is signed "Elisabeth Schulz" of Loretta, South Dakota, in 1900. See Ibid., 26 Dec. 1900.
57. Ibid., 2 Aug. 1905.
58. Ibid., May 1905.
59. Ibid., 26 April 1905.
60. Ibid., 10 July 1901.
61. Ibid., 16 May 1900.

## Chapter 4

1. This is a revised version of an article previously published as "The Mennonites of Waterloo, Ontario and Hanover, Manitoba, 1890s: A Study in Household and Community," *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 9 (1993): 187-209.
2. See, for example, Delbert Plett, ed and trans., "Letters from Nebraska," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, Nebraska and Kansas, 1874-1882* (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1990): 77-94.
3. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada: A People's Struggle for Survival, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 187.
4. Waldemar Janzen, "Geography of Faith," in *Still in the Image: Essays in Biblical Theology and Anthropology* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1982), 148.
5. Calvin Redekop, "The Mennonite Romance with the Land," in *Visions and Realities*, ed. Harry Loewen and Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion, 1985), 89.
6. Nancy-Lou Patterson, "Landscape and Meaning: Structure and Symbolism of the Swiss-German Mennonite Farmstead of Waterloo Region, Ontario," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 16 (1984): 50.
7. For a useful exposition of this difference, see James Juhnke, "Patterns of Mennonite Peoplehood Around 1890," in *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890-1930* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989). He contrasts the Swiss Mennonites' emphasis on humility and quiescence to the Dutch Mennonites' interest in organization and material culture; he also describes the Dutch Mennonites, liberating experience on the frontier where they met many non-Mennonites and

- were introduced to concepts of denominationalism; Swiss Mennonites, by contrast, cultivated a moderate conservatism.
8. Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 2.
  9. For standard accounts of the history of Canadian Mennonites during these years, see Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974). For sociological analyses of these communities, see J. Winfield Fretz, *The Waterloo Mennonites: A Community in Paradox* (Waterloo, ON, 1989); Francis, *In Search of Utopia*.
  10. Cornelius Plett, diary, 1895, trans. Delbert Plett, Steinbach Bible College [hereafter SBC], Steinbach, MB; Delbert Plett, *Plett Picture Book* (Steinbach, MB, 1982), 53-60; Rosabel Fast, "A History of the Plett Family" (unpublished research paper, University of Manitoba, 1978), 4.
  11. David Bergey, diary, 1866, 1881, 1900-01, 1909, 1911, MAO; Lorna Bergey, "Bergey Family and Farm History" (Waterloo, 1966); interview with Lorna Bergey, Waterloo, ON, November 1990.
  12. See Allan Smith, "Farms, Forests and Cities: The Image of Land and the Rise of the Metropolis in Ontario, 1860-1914," in *Old Ontario: Essays in Honour of J.M.S. Careless*, ed. D. Keane and C. Read (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1990), 71-94, 237-256; John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1983); Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries* (Waterloo, ON: Waterloo Historical Society, 1995); Gordon Darroch, "Scanty Fortunes and Rural Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century Central Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review* 79 (1998): 621-659.
  13. Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); *River Road: Essays on Manitoba and Prairie History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996); Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Lyle Dick, *Farmers 'Making Good': The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan 1880-1920* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks Service, 1989); Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Jeffery Taylor, *Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Agricultural Knowledge and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890-1925* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1994); Kenneth Sylvester, *The Limits of Rural Capitalism: Family, Culture, and Markets, in Montcalm, Manitoba, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).
  14. Roberto Perin, "Writing About Ethnicity," in *Writing About Canada*, ed. J. Schultz (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada, 1990), 223; Robert Harney, "Frozen Wastes: The State of Italian Canadian Studies," in *Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity*, ed. S.M. Tomasi (Staten Island, NY: Center for Migration Studies, 1977), 118.
  15. Isadore Snyder, diary, 1883-1910, MAO; Ephraim Cressman, diary, 1877-1892, MAO; Moses Bowman, diary, 1871, 1875, 1889, 1890, MAO; Abraham Friesen, "Tagebuch," 1884-1908, EMCA; Johann Dueck, diary, trans. J. Wohlgemuth, 1887-1892, EMCA; David Stoesz, diary, trans. n.n., 1872-1896, MHC. The diaries of Cressman and Bowman have been published in Royden Loewen, ed., *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists, 1863-1929* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press,

- 1999). Other relevant diaries in *From the Inside Out* include those of Cornelius Loewen, Heinrich Friesen, Abraham Reimer, Heinrich Kornelsen, and Moses Weber.
16. For a history of Hanover, see John Dyck, ed., *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve, 1874-1910* (Steinbach, MB, 1994); John Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, 1960 (Steinbach, MB: Hanover/Steinbach Historical Society, 2000).
17. *Census of Canada, 1901*, Table X, 158-159, 218-221.
18. For histories of Waterloo County, see English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener*; Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township*; Ezra Eby, *A Biographical History of Early Settlers and their Descendants in Waterloo Township, 1895* (Waterloo, ON: Eldon D. Weber, 1984).
19. *Census of Canada, 1901*, Table X.
20. *Census of Canada, 1901*; Hanover Municipality Tax Rolls, RMH. Winnipeg, possessing some 42,000 inhabitants by 1901, lay a full day's travel by horse from the centre of the municipality.
21. English and McLaughlin, *Kitchener*, 53ff.
22. Royden Loewen, "Ethnic Farmers and the Outside World: Mennonites in Manitoba and Nebraska," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 1 (1990): 195-214.
23. Bergey, diary.
24. Bowman, diary, 5 & 13 Feb. 1890.
25. Cressman, diary, 1890.
26. Cressman, diary, 25 & 28 Jan. 1890; 11, 12, 14 Feb. 1890; 26 & 31 May 1890; 4 & 6 June 1890; 11 & 19 Dec. 1890. Similar activity is recorded by Bergey, who attended a meeting of the Farmers' Institute on 2 May 1900 and wrote notices for a "Beef Meeting" on 31 March 1900. See Bergey, diary. For a full description of Ontario Mennonite participation in provincial and regional politics, see T.D. Regehr, *Peace, Order and Good Government: Mennonites in Politics in Canada* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 2000).
27. Plett, diary; Stoesz, diary.
28. Dueck, diary.
29. Abraham Friesen, "Tagebuch."
30. Stoesz, diary.
31. Canada Census (Nominal Records), 1901, Ontario, Waterloo North & Wilmot, Sub-districts C1-C5, H1-H6, Schedule # 1, Population, PAM; Canada Census (Nominal Records), 1901, Provencher, Hanover, Sub-districts, D1-D6, Schedule # 1, Population, PAM.
32. For other references to exogamy among Waterloo Mennonites, see Fretz, *Waterloo Mennonites*, 124.
33. Canada Census, 1901, Waterloo North; Wilmot; Berlin; Hanover.
34. Only after 1876, when Noah Stauffer was called to the ministry, was English begun to be used in church work. See L.J. Burkholder, *A Brief History of the Mennonites in Ontario* (Markham, ON: Mennonite Conference of Ontario, 1935), 99. As late as 1890, it was an anomaly for church services to be held in English. When the American publisher, John F. Funk, visited Waterloo County in 1890, Ephraim

- Cressman noted in his diary that Funk had preached in "English" (Cressman, diary, 1 June 1890).
35. Canada Census, 1901, Waterloo North; Wilmot; Hanover.
  36. *Ibid.*
  37. For a discussion of this phenomenon, see John Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, ed. D. Glass and D. Eversley (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1965), 101-143; John Gjerde, "A Tale of Two Households," in *Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 159-186.
  38. Diaries of Waterloo farmers more often refer to visiting a licensed medical practitioner than do the diaries of Hanover farmers.
  39. Chad Gaffield, "Children, Schooling and Family Reproduction in Nineteenth-Century Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review* 72, 2 (1991): 157-191.
  40. Land Title Abstracts, 7-6E, 6-6E, 5-6E (Province of Manitoba Land Titles Office [hereafter LTO], Winnipeg, MB) and Land Title Abstracts, Township of Waterloo, Lots 51-56 & Township of Wilmot, Block A, Concession II, Lots 13-16 (Waterloo County Land Registry Office [hereafter LRO], Kitchener, ON) indicate these prices.
  41. See David Gagan and Herbert Mays, "Historical Geography and Canadian Social History: Families and Land in Peel County, Ontario," *Canadian Historical Review* 54 (1973). Robert Dilley has suggested that in Waterloo County "migration was the exception rather than the rule." See Dilley, "Migrations and the Mennonites: Nineteenth-Century Waterloo County, Ontario," *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 4 (1984): 129.
  42. See Burkholder, *Mennonites in Ontario*, 130ff.
  43. See Dilly, "Migrations and the Mennonites"; Ezra Burkholder, diary, 1876, MAO; Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920*, 326ff.
  44. *Census of Canada, 1881; 1921*. The county of Perth to the west of Waterloo increased its Mennonite population from 616 in 1881 to 1335 in 1921; Oxford, to the southwest, saw an increase from 92 to 699; and Wellington, to the north, saw an increase from 221 to 508. The population of Waterloo and Wilmot townships only increased from 3048 Mennonites in 1881 to 3286 in 1921.
  45. James Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-industrial America," *Mary and William Quarterly* 35 (1978): 32.
  46. Hanover Municipal Tax Rolls, 7-6E, 6-6E, 5-6E, 1896; Waterloo Township Tax Rolls, 1896, Region of Waterloo [hereafter ROW], Kitchener, ON. These gaps between rich and poor were small compared to wealth differentiation in some Canadian cities. See Michael B. Katz, "The People of a Canadian City, 1851-1852," in *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History*, ed. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan E.J. Artibise (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1979), 235. Here the wealthiest 10 percent owned 88 percent of the wealth; the poorest 40 percent earned 1 percent of the income.
  47. The largest farmers in both Hanover and Waterloo seem also to have been those with the largest families. In 1896 the two largest farmers in Hanover in the three most populated townships were Klaas Reimer and Johann Plett, who owned 640 and 520 acres, respectively, and who had an average of 6.5 children at home; in 1896 the two

- largest landowners in Waterloo Township were Joseph Fry and Moses Kraft, farming 403 and 537 acres, respectively, and having an average of nine children at home. The three village districts in Hanover include Steinbach (6-6E), Blumenort (7-6E), and Gruenfeld (5-6E).
48. Hanover Tax Roll, 7-6E, 1883, 1898, 1906; C.W. Friesen, et al., *The Peter Penner Genealogy* (Steinbach, MB: n.p. 1973), 83-140.
49. Waterloo Township Tax Roll, 1896; Wilmot Township Tax Roll, 1896, ROW; Eby, *Biographical History*, 18, 57, 123.
50. For a discussion of the bilateral partible inheritance system in other groups, see Walter Goldsmidt and Evelyn Jacobson, "The Structure of the Peasant Family," *American Anthropologist* 73 (1971): 1058-1070; Sonya Salamon and Ann McKey Keim, "Land Ownership and Women's Power in a Midwestern Farming Community," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 41 (1979): 109-179; Ernestine Friedl, "The Position of Women: Appearance and Reality," *Anthropological Quarterly* 40 (1967): 97-108; Gjerde, *Minds of the West*, 382.
51. For a more detailed discussion of this system, see Chapter One.
52. Susan Burke, "Gifts from Home: the Waterloo County Dowry," *Waterloo County Times* 5, 3 (1990): 4. See also Jeannette Lasansky, *A Good Start: The Aussteuer or Dowry* (Lewisburg, PA: Union County Historical Society, 1990).
53. Mae Yantzi, ed., *Family Tree of David and Barbara Brenneman* (Glen Alla, ON: n.p., 1979), 3.
54. Clara Roth, et al., "Family History and Genealogy of Jacob Gingerich and Veronica Litwiller" (Baden, ON: n.p., 1975), 8.
55. Peter Reimer, "Rechnungsbuch, 1890-1900," Gerhard Reimer, Goshen, IN; Hanover Tax Roll, 7-6E, 1896, RMH.
56. These statistics are derived from the biographical sketches in Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition* (Blumenort, MB: Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, 1983), 265-324.
57. Bergey, diary, 1 June 1900. Bergey raised a total of \$7339.63 from eight sources, the largest from Susanna Zeller for \$4500 on a mortgage, Lydia Bergey for \$1100, Anna Bowman for \$300, the smallest from the bank for \$25.00. Zeller appears to be a fifty-year-old spinster from Breslau.
58. Eby, *Biographical History*, 123.
59. Betty Lou Eby Robbins, *The Henry Bear Family History* (Glenworth, ON: n.p., 1977), 4; interview with Lorna Shantz Bergey, 7 August 1991.
60. *Census of Canada, 1901*, Agriculture, Ontario, Waterloo; Manitoba, Provencher. The value of machinery for the average southeastern Manitoba farmer (District of Provencher) was \$572, compared to \$447 for the Waterloo farmer.
61. See, for example, Robert Ankli and Wendy Miller, "Ontario Agriculture in Transition: The Switch from Wheat to Cheese," *Journal of Economic History* 42 (1982): 207-217; J.I. Little, "The Wheat Trade and Economic Development in Upper and Lower Canada," *Acadiensis* 11 (1981): 141-151; Friesen, *Canadian Prairies*, 301ff; Voisey, *Vulcan*, 77ff.
62. Waterloo Township Tax Rolls, 1896; Warkentin, *Mennonite Settlements*.



63. Bergey, diary; Cressman, diary; Snyder, diary.
64. Loewen, "Ethnic Farmers." Although the Ontario farms were clearly larger, the basic annual farm inventories resembled each other. Waterloo County farmers from Waterloo Township kept an average of 12.8 cattle, 7.6 swine, and 5.3 horses, and Hanover farmers from three selected townships kept an average of 13.1 cattle (7.3 cows), 5.6 swine, and 3.9 horses.
65. Heinrich Balzer, "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered in a Treatise of 1833," trans. and ed. Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 22, 2 (1946): 80. For a present-day observation of the working out of this principle, see Fretz, *Waterloo*, 183. He suggests that "farming and religious principles such as separation from the world, frugal and simple living, the ethics of love and nonviolence all go well together."
66. See diaries of Plett, Stoesz, Dueck, Snyder, Bergey, Cressman, Bowman.
67. Bowman, diary, 1 March 1890; 19 July 1890; 23 September 1890.
68. Bergey, diary. Similar work patterns were evident in the Plett household in Hanover: here, on 9 September 1895 while son Cornelius plowed, Cornelius Sr. "took barley to the mill" in Steinbach; and on September 12, while the son "dug potatoes," the father "hauled oats, butter and eggs to Winnipeg" (Plett, diary).
69. Bowman, diary; Plett, diary.
70. For a discussion of women in nineteenth-century agriculture, see Martine Segalen, *Love and Power in the Peasant Family: Rural France in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. S. Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Sally McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change, 1820-1885* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996).
71. Stoesz, diary, 22 July & 17 Sept. 1891.
72. Bergey, diary, 15 Feb. 1900; 27 March 1900.
73. Bergey, diary, 30 Nov 1900; Bowman, diary, 23 July 1890. See also Bergey, diary, 20 Feb., 16 March, 24 March, 7 April, 14 April, 25 July, 10 Nov., 4 Dec. 1900.
74. See Henry Fast, "Kleine Gemeinde Brandordnung," in *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, ed. D. Plett (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1989), 269-278; Jake Peters, *The Waisenam: A History of Mennonite Inheritance Custom* (Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Village Museum, 1985).
75. Stoesz, diary, 16 Oct. 1890; Plett, diary, 12 Sept. 1895.
76. See Dennis Stoesz, "A History of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church," MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1987; Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*.
77. See diaries of Plett, Stoesz, and Dueck.
78. Burkholder, *Mennonites in Ontario*, 156ff; Bergey, diary, 12 April 1900, notes that he collected money for the church's "Poor Fund" and dispersed \$30.00 of it for a Mr. Schlimm. See also Reg Good, "War as a Factor in Mennonite Economic Policy: A

Case Study of Insurance Institutions Sponsored by the Ontario Conference, 1864–1954,” MA thesis, University of Waterloo, 1984.

79. Snyder, diary.

80. Bowman, diary.

81. There are many examples of informal community interactions. On 27 June 1900, David Bergey sent his son “Ezra [to] M. Bock’s raising,” and the next day Gilbert was sent to “Bricker’s raising.” On 21 June 1900, Bergey hired “Amos Bock, wife and daughter ... to hoe turnips” (Bock was forty-six, owned one-quarter acre, and had six children ages five to twenty-one). On 8 January 1890, Moses Bowman collected the unpaid debt from neighbor Abram Buehler of \$125 plus interest, and from his son Moses of \$700. On 26 June 1900, “Gilbert [Bergey] fetched tiles in Berlin ... and delivered to Moses Toman those we had borrowed.” On 4 April 1892, Ozias Snyder found his measure of oats, by exchanging peas at his neighbor’s, J.S. Betzner. On 18 November 1890, Ephraim Cressman bought a hay rake out of season for \$11.25 at “David Gowdy’s sale.” See diaries of Bergey, Cressman, Snyder, Bowman.

82. Bergey, diary. These networks also included Mennonites of other settlements. In 1900 David Bergey hosted visitors from North Dakota on 4 January, from Alberta on 24 January, from Kansas on 12 October, and from Michigan on 17 December.

83. Delbert Plett, *Plett Picture Book* (Steinbach, MB: DFP Publications, 1982), 22.

84. Plett, diary, Jan. – June, 1895. Abraham R. Friesen interactions with kin represented 80 percent of his social contacts during the first six months of 1895. These figures were lower, only 34 percent, for Johann Dueck, but he may have been an exception; he had joined the progressive Holdeman church and through this network became one of the few Hanover men with a wife from Kansas who had no relations in Manitoba. To observe Plett’s kinship ties from his sister’s perspective, see the 1892 diary of Margaretha Plett Kroeker in Loewen, *From the Inside Out*.

85. For other references to this link, see Tamara Hareven, “The History of the Family and the Complexity of Social Change,” *American Historical Review* 96 (1991): 108.

86. Cressman, diary, 17 April 1890; 15 May 1890; 14 Aug. 1890; 29 Nov. 1890.

87. Bergey, diary, Jan. – June, 1900; Bowman, diary, Jan. – June, 1890; Cressman, diary, Jan. – June, 1890.

88. Jack Goody, “The Evolution of the Family,” in *Household and Family in Past Time*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 103–124.

89. Census of Canada, 1901, Waterloo North; Wilmut; Hanover.

90. Waterloo tax records reveal that 8669 acres of 23,054 owned by Mennonites of Waterloo Township were owned or operated jointly by parents and married children; in Manitoba’s Township 7-6E, the four village districts of Blumenort, Greenland, Blumenhof, and Neuanlage cultivated a total of 9047 acres, of which 1340 appear to be operated jointly by the households of parents and married children. Another set of figures derived from these tax records indicate that 6 of 54 (11 percent) Blumenort Township households farmed jointly, compared to 134 of 379 (35 percent) Waterloo Township households.

## Chapter 5

1. Parts of this review essay have previously been published as book reviews in the *Great Plains Quarterly* and *Canadian Review of American Studies*.
2. Rudolph J. Vecoli, "An Inter-Ethnic Perspective on American Immigration," *Mid America* 75 (1993): 223-235.
3. Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: UCL Press, 1997).
4. D. Aidan McQuillan, *Prevailing Over Time: Ethnic Adjustment on the Kansas Prairies, 1875-1925* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).
5. Fred Stambrook, ed., *A Sharing of Diversities: Proceedings of the Jewish Mennonite Ukrainian Conference 'Building Bridges'* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre/University of Regina, 1999).
6. Brian W. Beltman, *Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley: The Life and Letters of Ulbe Eringa, 1866-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).
7. *Ibid.*, 8.
8. *Ibid.*, 11 and 196.
9. See Frank Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *A Century of European Migrations 1830-1930*, ed. Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne Sinke (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 17-57.
10. Beltman, *Dutch Farmer*, 4.
11. Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and Their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996).
12. *Ibid.*, 1.
13. *Ibid.*, 127.
14. *Ibid.*, 180.
15. Jon Gjerde, *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).
16. *Ibid.*, 22.
17. *Ibid.*, 163.
18. *Ibid.*, 63.
19. Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).
20. *Ibid.*, 3.
21. *Ibid.*, 5.
22. *Ibid.*, 33.
23. *Ibid.*, 5.
24. *Ibid.*, xi.

## Conclusion

1. Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
2. Fredrik Barth, "Introduction," in *Balinese Worlds* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
3. "Dordrecht Confession of Faith," in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, ed. Harold S. Bender, Cornelius Krahn, and C. Henry Smith (Scottsdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955), 92-93.





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In the 1870s, approximately 18,000 Mennonites migrated from the southern steppes of Imperial Russia (present-day Ukraine) to the North American grasslands. They brought with them an array of cultural and institutional features that indicated they were a "transplanted" people. What is less frequently noted, however, is that they created in their everyday lives a world that ensured their cultural longevity and social cohesiveness in a new land.

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Royden Loewen is a professor of history and Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. His other books include *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds*, and *From the Inside Out: The Rural World of Mennonite Diarists*.

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